

The MIDLAND

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THE OLD ONE

SANORA BABB

"It was a mighty poor time to die," said the old woman, her voice hard and thin like shells. "You men take him in and lay him down on the bed in the north room. Eli, you call to town." She stood wiping her horny old hands on the apron that tied around her waist and rolled her belly out in a curved flesh-fall. "I'd almost think he was playin' dead like that hound does yonder it bein' so sudden and all."

One of the men took a blue bandana from the hip pocket of his overalls, shaking the dust and broom seeds from it before he spread it over the old man's face, already waxen with stilled blood, and set in a tired way . . . tired with the work of fields and tired with heat. A gentleness lay in the upward ended wrinkles and the white beard of a few days stood out stiff and alien from his face.

"Afraid of him?" queried the old woman, and her teeth fell down in her mouth as she spoke. They were blue-white and evenly shaped, and looked more like death than the mask on the old man's face. "They're cheap, dang them. I ordered them, and I reckon I won't never get new ones now," she said, eyeing the angular bony girl standing still and frightened in the yard beside her.

"Gerty," the old woman said, "You tell your folks I'm goin' to keep you after this seedin' is over too. That ought to get the look off from your face." The thin girl tried to smile at the old woman.

"Yeh, I need it," she said, watching the old woman putting her wide feet down flatly on the hard bare yard, going toward the house. Half way she turned full around.

"You can have one day free like a town girl," she said, as if she must at once settle all the problems arising from the old man's death.

Gerty walked slowly after her to the house, listening to the screen door slam with a wing of

her mind that seemed no part of her. She wanted to go out to the barn and weep for the old man as was befitting death. She wanted to weep because he was old and kind, and because he had dropped down helplessly there with the dry yellow brush in his aged arms, dropped down in the hot afternoon, foggy with dust from the broom corn fanning in the seeder. Gerty was going to cry, so she made loud noises with the kettle lids at the stove. Suddenly and awkwardly she ran out of the kitchen, forgetful with a pan lid in one hand, escaping to the barn, sobbing in little lost whines. The old woman looked after her in consternation.

"Well, I never," she said. "She'll have me cryin'," she said and hurried to the stove. "These beans are as dry as a bone," growled the old woman to herself, "dry as a bone, dry as my eyes for him dyin' at such a time."

The men came out of the north room on tiptoes and solemn. They would have passed the old woman by with an inarticulate respect for her grief. She was scraping at the beans that had stuck to the bottom of the dry kettle, and she did not look at their feet, but when they reached the door she said, still not seeing them, "You needn't walk on your toes. He can't hear you." The men handled their new shyness among them with their eyes and went out wordless.

The throb of the seeder set up again and the old woman could hear the swish of the brush being pushed along the new pine tables. "It ain't right," she mumbled, "pears he could've lasted out the week. I got my hands full."

Gerty came in quietly. Bright cushions of flesh had arisen around her dull eyes and her nose was pink in her sallow face, the skin of it tight and shining as if it might burst and spray color into her bloodless cheeks. She went straight to the wash stand and dipped water from the bucket to fill the granite pan. She washed her hands carelessly and then if the old woman was not looking,

she dashed her face with the cold water. Gerty hoped she would not have to blow her aching nose. She started for the door with the pan in her hand.

"Don't be throwin' that water out. You'd think we had a well," cautioned the old woman without looking at Gerty.

"I forget," faltered the girl, "because we have one at home."

"Well, you ain't home. What you washin' for anyway?"

"I been handling the hens," lied Gerty, "Them two Plymouth Rocks want to set."

"Break 'em up," growled the old woman, "This ain't no time. Put them in a coop. Go on, before they steal out."

Gerty escaped the kitchen and the silent knowing of the old woman, and went in search of the hens she had not handled. She found them and coaxed them to her with grain, which the hens were reluctant to eat, feeling cross and busy with wanting their nests. The girl was gentle and free with the hens and talked to them. They cocked their heads and never doubted her sympathy with their strange bright eyes, but they scolded and clucked and demanded their eggs in a nest. Gerty held the warm hens close to her body before placing them in the coop, then she sat down on her feet.

"Tonight I will hide your nests and keep out a few eggs every day. Tommorrow you can get out of here, you silly old hens," and her voice fell down through the laths of the coop soft and full with the secret.

II

It was a bitter day for the funeral. As if no softness could be spared for grief, the skies hung gray and sullen near the earth, closed over a day which farmers would waste for death. Though it was the high time of summer, a wind came out of the north as cold as November, and men awoke and smelled the crystal air, saying among themselves or in their minds that such a wind was blowing out of hail. They thought of their fields and of grain turned dry and ripe, and some forgot the dead. In the half of morning, the moving sky flung down a rain as sharp and cold as the wind, and because the wind blew on, it whipped and waved the rain like a silver banner over the treeless plains. The rain turned into sleet and finally hail that ceased no sooner than it had begun, and the day went through its hours quiet and cold.

Families stirred themselves out of doors to har-

ness their teams and carry chairs from the house to the wagon, for everyone dressed in his best and drove the wide country over for a funeral. Straw had been placed in the wagons and gay cotton quilts tied with little bright knots of wool were brought from the beds and spread over. Children stood about eager with the cold, remembering warm exciting winter rides under the intimacy of the tented quilts. Their faces shone from soap, and there were a few, whose parents had more than the rest, with spread brown feet pinched into Saturday shoes. They who must drive far took food in a basket and fodder for the horses.

At the house of the old woman, two wagons were ready. A hand would have driven one for the old woman, but she waved him away to the other come from a neighboring farm for her, without thanks to the young man waiting. He stood there tall and shy in his clean overalls, smoothing the brown rump of his patient mare, and thinking that Gerty might have sat beside him. But Gerty was on the wagon seat, frozen by his presence into silence and indifference, never looking at him, nor minding, he told himself.

"Hey, Mark," prodded the hand who had climbed onto the seat.

The old woman stepped twice on the wagon wheel, first on the fat hub, next on the gray metal rim, and settled herself ably on the seat. She took the leather lines from the girl beside her and drove through the gate and onto the road. The pine box, yellow and new and strange, rode behind her with little shivers and thuds over the wagon bed. She looked back now and then, as if she would apologize for the roughness of the road, but she turned back to Gerty with words of the crops, dry and firm in her mouth.

"Broom corn is a poor thing to raise these days," she said. "If I could get the north quarter ditched for water from the dam, I'd raise alfalfa and plant nothin' but feed and melons on the rest of the land. He never wanted water," the old woman said.

"Where would you get the money for irrigation?" Gerty asked.

"I got my hens," she said, "and this year's broom."

"You need a cow," said Gerty, "and a well."

"Never you mind," said the old woman slyly, "Never you mind."

III

Horses were loosed from their wagon tongues and their tugs thrown over their backs. Their

mouths were freed of bits and their necks curved to the scattered fodder on the ground. Families were eating their lunches and children were trading hard boiled eggs and chicken legs and sometimes a cookie among themselves. Little Claude Bagger, whose father and mother lived in a half-dugout on an unyielding strip of land to the south, stood apart eating his butterless pancake because no one wanted to trade with him. If any mother had noticed him, she would have given him a good piece of chicken from her basket, but no mother noticed, so much there was for talk among the wives. It was Gerty who saw him at last twisting his brown toes into the damp earth, chewing, and watching the others shyly as if he were ashamed for the difference of his food. Gerty had eaten the small rooster thigh, and remorse ached in her throat as she watched the boy's face. She took him an egg and bread with wild plum butter, and offered to trade them for the round flat cake. Before he could accept, Mark came up.

"Hold on a minute, Claude," he said. "Don't give Gerty all that pancake."

The little boy looked askance, his shyness almost dissolved in his pleasure.

"Tear it in two," said Mark, "and I'll trade you this drumstick for half."

The boy divided his lunch and sat down at once to the feast. Gerty and Mark stood above him eating the halves of their cake. Mark did not look at Gerty, but she knew he was there, and suddenly she thought of the hens and the secret nests she had made them.

After everyone had eaten men carried the new pine box from the wagon into the one-room school house, and there placed it on benches, which ever after these children would remember and fear for having held the mysterious dead. The women ceased their talking and changed into their looks of grief as easily as they had changed into their freshly ironed dresses. The men were uncomfortable and would not look at one another. Among them all the children stood wide-eyed and silent, pinched and pulled from their restlessness by their saddened mothers. The pale thin man took his place at the teacher's desk and ahemed and ahemed before he could tell them the goodness of the old man sleeping, and the mercy of God, oh the mercy of. He asked them all to sing a hymn and all of them sang a hymn. There was a long moment of quiet after, then a shuffle of feet toward the front of the room. They filed by the box curious and subdued by the presence of death, the wo-

men lifting the smaller children up to see. There they saw him tense and final with hands strangely pale and unnaturally curved, wearing his black broadcloth suit that had long ago turned green, and lying apologetically on the old woman's best pieced quilt. The women wept and peered at the old woman, who stood dry eyed blowing the tears through her nose and sucking her teeth into place.

The horses were hitched to the wagons again and they all started over the prairie. Mark had asked the old woman to ride with him and she had climbed onto her own wagon with never a word. She held the horses patient while the box was placed once more in the wagon behind her. But now the pale thin man would sit on the seat beside her, and Gerty sat between Mark and the hired man. When they came to the cemetery that was fenced around with barbed wire and planted with a few white slabs and many wooden paddles, there was the gaping wound of earth awaiting the tired old man. Gerty watched the old woman looking at the graves grown over with thick knots of buffalo grass, and others yet with no grass at all. She watched the old woman keeping her eyes away from the clean new grave where the rich loam lay dark and fragrant from the morning rain. She had set her lips tight against the trembling that threatened them, and heard no word of the droning voice that crawled over the grave as the men lowered the coffin. Two women put their arms around the old bereaved one and wept into their handkerchiefs. The old woman was so uncomfortable at this that she called out over the grave to the praying man,

"Amen." she called, "Let the man rest, Amen."

And all around through the hush that fell the little false sobs of women weeping curled back into their throats and were still.

The men and the women and the children in awe went along the paths between the graves, went along the barren graves and out the gate. Mark passed Gerty silently and touched her arm and nodded. This was not a day to feel so happy, thought the girl, but here it was, something new and unexpected pounding in her breast and sailing through her like the moon sails through a cloudy sky. And over there the mound was that made her turn and weep.

While Gerty waited for the old woman to speak to the farmer who owned the irrigated land just beyond the north quarter, she listened to the soft full sound of the earth falling, falling into the old man's grave.

FIRST WORDS

JOHN A. BEADLE

He wondered if the sparrow would come close enough to touch. It alighted on a weed at the edge of the road and swung to and fro. The weed swayed as the bird dropped from branch to branch until it dropped to the ground. It stood there observing his actions with curiosity and approval. His motions were regular as clockwork and in no wise disturbed the bird. The thing ruffled its plumage with its beak and a small minute cloud of dust floated away. Filthy, he thought; probably full of lice.

His hands ached until they seemed to grow in size; the dull pain forced itself into his consciousness until his hands seemed to be the most important part of his body; they seemed to be enormous. They had told him that; they said, "Keep your fingers close together so that you press with an even surface; otherwise your hands will give out." But he had forgot.

"Out goes the bad air; in comes the good. Out goes the bad air; in comes the good air." He hadn't said it right the first time; that ruined the rhythm. The second time was right; five to five — an even proportion. When you said the first five words you placed the hands with the fingers close together at the base of the ribs of the one prostrated and pressed slowly and evenly downward; when you said the second five words you sat back; then you repeated the action indefinitely, interminably; you worked automatically, never stopping or breaking the sequence of your motions. After a while you didn't say the words; you just did it and did it right; something inside of you took care of that; you could look around and think, just as he was doing; right now he was looking at a sparrow, a dirty, lousy, insignificant bird. It looked at his swaying body and chirped. Then it moved into the dust of the road and settled itself luxuriously, laving itself in the clay dust. It fluttered its wings, worked its body back and forth and cheeped contentedly, almost sleepily. He hated it; it was so comfortable; he thought of himself slipping with a sigh into a tub of warm water; how it laved his body and caressed his skin; it was weakening but it was a delicious feeling. The bird twisted in the dust and he spat and cursed at it. Startled, it flew away and the dust

cloud raised by the beating of its wings floated gently and slowly across the road where it settled on the begrimed weeds.

He felt lonesome when it had gone. If only his hands would stop aching; they felt swollen. It was a good thing he knew what to do; safety meetings had their purpose after all. He thought of the first safety meeting; the company insisted on one meeting a week; he had been with a surveyor's gang; they had reached the edge of a stream and in the shade of a tree on its bank the leader had called a safety meeting. He gave each of them a book and then there was a practical demonstration of artificial resuscitation; he showed them the correct prone position; "Strike the shoulders a sharp blow before you begin so as to dislodge a chew of tobacco, or gum or anything in the mouth that might prevent breathing. Straddle just one leg of the prone man so that when someone takes your place the artificial breathing is not interrupted." He had made one man lie down and then all of them practiced on him; they switched from one man to another without losing a beat. It was good practice. One thing he had said, "Don't give up; keep working away." Tommy had said, "We worked nineteen hours on a man — but he got it right through the heart I guess, 'cause he never came to. We had plenty of relief though."

He hoped that someone would come along and give him some relief. He didn't know how long he had been doing this. When someone did come along he would have him take his place; when you straddled one leg it was easy to change off. First he would throw himself face downward and bury his face in his hands and rest; then he would sit up and put his hands between his legs and then cross his legs tightly so they would press against his burning palms. That would give him some relief. Then he would tell how it happened. He would say, "Mike was up the pole and I was at the truck there getting him another pair of pliers. I didn't hear a sound. When I looked up there was Mike hanging by his safety belt. I was afraid he'd fall or slip out of the belt. I didn't have spurs on — I'm a groundman and helper — but I put a pair on in a hurry and I shinnied up; I threw a rope over the cross arm, tied one end to his belt and

lowered him. And I've been working on him all along. I'm sure glad you came. I don't know how long I'd been able to last. My hands were giving out. . . . He got 2200 . . . He didn't fall though. Lots of times they're killed more by the fall than they are by the electricity. There's lots of hope, I think. Gees, I'm glad you came along."

That's what he would say. But there was no one in sight. The road was deserted as only a side country road can be. He started to laugh. Wait until he told the fellows! When he gave Mike a sharp blow on the shoulders to dislodge anything in his mouth, his upper plate had come out. There it lay now, with its even white teeth rising out of the red composition. That would be something to laugh about later. He noticed the wrinkles on the back of Mike's neck; he was getting old. When the flesh wrinkled back of your ears and there were creases like that you weren't young any more. The straggly hair, a mixed grey, bordered the bald spot unevenly. He thought that it looked like the place in a yard where you burned refuse. The fire burned away the grass in an uneven circular spot and the scorched grass surrounded the bald spot just as Mike's hair did.

He noticed how wide Mike's shoulders were. They tapered down to a slim waist for a man of his years. He was built like a wedge; a woman was built like an hourglass. His hands were bothering him; he couldn't stop but the pain was intolerable. How long he had been doing this he had no idea. He didn't have to say it any more. "Out goes the bad air; in comes the good air." That's all there was to it, provided your hands didn't give out. They felt extremely large and he thought of those advertisements for soap. A woman with domestic hands was shown at a bridge table and her hands were the largest part of her. It was called an inferiority complex because she was ashamed of their condition. His hands felt as large as those in that picture.

If Mike would only give some sign. He looked at Mike with his head laid sideways on the back of his hand. The other hand was stretched outright, flat along the ground, just like the illustrated pamphlets on the method. He made a sobbing sound that was loud, just like a child when it can't cry any more. They had told him that; the boss said, "When you're working on an unconscious man you can hear him sougning for forty feet." He wondered if he were that far away if he could hear him. Most likely. A man didn't make that

noise when he breathed by his own power.

If he stopped making that noise it would be a good sign, showing that the muscles were starting to work of their own accord. He wished Mike would regain consciousness. Never stop. Hours may elapse and still there is hope. You never knew. If this was a main highway he would have plenty of aid to spell him; they could send for a lung motor and a doctor. As it was he'd have to keep going by himself, provided his hands didn't give out.

What would Mike say when he woke up? Usually people coming out of a faint, or regaining consciousness, said, "Where am I?" or "What happened?" Would Mike say the first or second? He'd watch for the first words.

It was to be expected that this should happen. They had told Mike many a time that he would get it. He was a good lineman as far as working ability and knowledge went, but he was careless. Usually the longer you work with electricity and the more you see of its effects the more you respect it. Mike had seen two men get it; one had been thrown from a thirty foot pole and had fallen on the back of his neck, breaking it and shattering his head like a ripe melon. Another had got it during a storm; the streets were flooded and a trolley wire was down, broken by a tree that had been shattered by lightning. This man hadn't touched the wire; he had been wading in the water and the water was charged and he was killed though he was ten feet away from the wire. But that didn't seem to make Mike afraid; he would constantly handle hot stuff with gloves that were showing signs of wear; he was tight that way; he never bought new equipment unless he had to; the foreman examined the material and told his men to get new gloves, or a new safety belt. But Mike never would; then the foreman would ground him until he had new equipment. A man was a fool to act like that; a foreman couldn't be held responsible for a man like that. Mike would swarm up a pole and start working before he knew which were the primary wires or what voltage they carried. There were ways of telling from the insulation and the insulators but even at that he would be in a mess of wire where if he moved his head sharply and quickly he would make a contact that would kill him. Most likely that was what had happened this morning — or was it afternoon by this time? The fellows had all told Mike; they cursed at him; "You dumb ape, you'll get it one of these days sure as shoot-in'." And Mike had grinned and cursed back.

Every one would say now, "Well, we told him. A man can't get away with it all the time." He'd have to admit that, though nobody would have the nerve to tell it to him to his face. That is, if Mike lived. Funny how he took it for granted that Mike was going to come to — that is if his hands didn't refuse to answer. Every time he thought about what he was doing he became conscious of the pain of his hands. It was a dull burning throbbing ache. Sometimes he forgot about the pain when he was thinking about something else except Mike and pumping away at him.

There was a dull insistent humming in the air; at first he had attributed it to the telephone wires on the other side of the road. When he was a child he had listened to the wires sing. It was the loneliest wierdest sound in the world. It seemed to be the voice of the prairie moaning to itself; he saw a long road that stretched off unendingly, winding slightly with a staggering line of posts outlining its course into a drab rain-filled west. Often he had put his ear against the posts in the childish belief that he could hear what was being said over all the wires; all there was was a more distinct humming. When he heard that sound a vast melancholia overcame him and he wanted to give way to tears.

He looked at the bushes that surrounded him; they were common weeds that rose to his waist when he was standing; probably when he bent over Mike he disappeared altogether; that must be a funny sight to someone else; though there was no one to watch him. They were covered with long white blossoms like miniatures of lilacs. As he watched a bee alighted on one and swayed to and fro on the dipping flower. The thing clambered clumsily over the blossom; there was something voracious and greedy in its attack; then it flew away and he saw that there were hundreds of bees on the weeds so that they made a distinct humming sound that seemed to come from nowhere; it was a different sound from that made by the telephone wires.

Suddenly he was aware that the loud artificial breathing of the man had lessened somewhat; he took this as a good sign that the muscles were beginning to work of their own accord, but he did not cease working. His mind went back to the first words he expected Mike to say. One or the other — "What happened?" or "Where am I?" That's what they always said in books and plays and movies and that was what a woman had said who fainted in a crowd; she said "Where am I,"

most likely because she had felt herself getting faint and knew what had happened.

Mike moved his head where it rested on his hand; then he sighed prodigiously and rolled over on his back. He looked up at the sky with dazed uncomprehending eyes; then he rolled over on his belly again, raised himself to his hands and knees, and was wretchedly sick at his stomach. He wiped the back of his hand against his mouth, continuing the motion onto his sleeve. He picked up his false teeth; he held them in his hand and considered them gravely.

His helper was silent; there was a grimace of pain on his face; he sat with his legs crossed and his hands between his legs. When he exerted pressure with his legs his hands were relieved for a moment. He looked at Mike sitting there with his arms dangling over his raised knees; his head was drooped; he looked weak. He wondered what Mike would say. He noticed how sunken Mike's face looked with the false teeth out. He was seized with a sudden fear that Mike would speak before he replaced his teeth; if he did it would be just a mumble and he would never know what his first words were.

Mike moved; he raised his teeth to his mouth; they went in with a little snap; he clamped his jaws — rather weakly — to see that they fitted well. He looked at his helper nursing his hands between his legs. He grinned.

"Well, I finally got it," he said.

SHEEPHERDER'S MONUMENT

TED OLSON

A sky that took no cognizance of man,
An earth too dour and vast to call him neighbor,
Constrained the swart, anonymous artisan
To set himself, like Pharaoh, to this labor.
Impotent, ignominious, alone
But for his sheep, and one hawk cruising high,
He piled his ludicrous challenge stone on stone,
Crying in pigmy pyramids: "I am I!"

Do not deride him. Thus have all men done
Since Babel, lifting stony fists at fate.
One rears a shepherd's obelisk, and one
A Woolworth building, or an Empire State —
Allies against oblivion, brother and brother.
I, too, lay pebble words on one another.

IKE AND EM

LEO R. WARD

I went to a dance one night in a new house overlooking the Creek. The place was a little awkward to reach. You went northeast up a hill on a white-clay road till you turned into a field on the left half way to the top and kept sidling off west and a little north in a kind of lefthanded way nearly to the brink, and there was Bill's and Effie's new house built like a shoulder on the hill.

A great friend of mine, Joe Roberts, dead now these ten or twelve years, had got ready for the occasion. He had shaved the day before, had laid his short gray sticks of hair back taut, and had greased his shoes. His suit, not of any color, not black or brown or blue, was heavy as leather and sat unevenly on him. Joe was a sallow little man, born swarthy, and his face was so hard and thin that you could see the muscles working in it. The two of us had planned on this dance the four weeks we'd been shucking in the bottom, and used to shout from our loaded wagons at noon and especially in the evenings over to Tad and Charley Dippold to ask whether they were going and what night Bill had fixed for the dance.

At the last minute, Joe and I made up our minds to ride, though half an hour would have taken us afoot over the ends of the hills where they broke down into the main valley. I saddled a sliver of a mare I had picked up that fall, a kind of dirty sorrel with a stripe in her face, and Joe rode a finished squat gray of J. J.'s, the man for whom we worked. We went up the Ridge Road to Sam Pavlick's, where a road from the south met ours and the two took off together in a northeasterly way down some small hills, all the time making in general toward the Creek. Joe always spoke in a hoarse tight tone, as if he had some unexpected trouble with his throat. "Here she is now, here's the gate," he said, and we pulled our horses haw into the field and came to the dance.

Bill was a thick-set short man whose jaws had great knobs at the hinges. He was quick and earnest in every sound and step of his greeting. So, in meaning at least, was Effie, a blond thin woman poorly put together, long in arms and legs and face. She was one of the Tom Wamman girls from away down the bottom eight or ten miles, and we never did see any of her people except a

brother who once when the snow was on drove a pair of blue roans up the Ridge.

The dancing was hard, and everybody did much of it. Ike and Em Cooper were there. So were the Dippold girls of course, Lizzie and Fern, in red faces that must have been oiled. Also the Slav Anna from our farmhouse, a mountainous girl of sixteen, her face mulched with talc. Early in the winter's evening one of the Dal Richmond boys had come and taken her, one might say by force, she was so big, and walked her around four or five miles by their place to the dance. That was the sum of the dancing girls, these three and the two women. The Graney girls were there, but everyone knew that neither of them danced. The bucks were eight or nine, counting in Ike and Bill.

The dancing was very hard. The event was in the way of a house-warmer, and the house, yet unplastered and no stove in it, was as cold as the loft of a barn. Every man and woman, except Effie and Bill, danced with all their things on. Joe Roberts said a day or two afterwards that he danced "so plague take it much" that he couldn't walk for a week. Be sure too that we went there to dance and not to sit looking at each other. The plan had been to run two sets and to use the two rooms of the house, but as it was we could run just one and just one girl could rest at a time. We crammed into one room, stuffed the door and window tight, squared off and danced.

Ike Cooper danced in felts. It is safe to say they were the only shoes he had, and they were all he needed. The felts, more shoe than stocking and more boot than shoe, were soft big things of a hempen, ropy look, and were covered over, half way up, by all-rubber goloshes. The twenty years they were married, Ike had not touched a plow or pulled a weed. He teamed up an old dun mule with a rat-tailed mare, and made a little cash now and then as a propper, cutting and hauling timber to the mines. I never was in Em's house, but they say that the pig licked up what fell from the table. There were only five or six children, all of them lank and scary.

Em knew long-green from horse-shoe, and she knew how to dance. She wore a long cotton skirt in many folds and bags, but firm and tight at the

waist, above which the same gray or black or peppered goods fluffed out again, till at the neck it ran into lace and pointed stiff and straight at the lobes of the ears. Ike and Em simply hoed 'er down. Not a girl in the place could do the changes with half so sure a foot as Em's. It is true she was swung off her feet once or twice, but only because she wanted to be, and even then she knew every turn in the dance and stepped right ahead for the had-a-man-left or first-couple-out. Ike let her go now and then for a moment, and she unfolded like a kite taking wind. She sailed out to the corners of the room, dancing all the time and appearing to be free of Ike and to be dancing on her own account, but she was Ike's and he pulled her back as if she were a ball attached to a rubber band. She was willing to show off, and was such a dancer that without trying she would have caught the laziest eye.

All the same, I am bold enough to say that Ike was a more perfect dancer. He stayed close in and seemed to keep dancing in the same spot. The truth is, he could dance a great deal in a small space. He attended to the music, to the range he had, to his partner and the other couples, and above all to his steps and the dance. It was plain that he did not dance to be seen, but for the inner relish of it. A couple of times he sped noticeably, but only for an instant, and the very best thing he did (I would say) were the little jigs and trots

and curly-cues he put in at the corners, not as a special or odd feature but as a vital part of the dance. It might possibly be said, as the one exception you could take to Ike on the floor, that in his earnestness he leaned forward just a little too much.

People still wonder when I tell them that we had a blind fiddler that night. So did I wonder, for a moment. But there he was, an underfed, lone-looking man, in a big lumpy suit, his frame propped half against the wall, half against the floor as he fiddled and called. "First couple out to the couple on the right! . . . Four hands up, and four hands all! . . . Had-a-man Joe, and had-a-man Jack! . . . Lady round the lady and the gent so-lo, Lady round the gent and the gent don't go! . . . Four-and-six!" Most of these signals meant little more than, "Fall to!" But the four-and-six always stopped the common dancers dead. They may sometimes have started out right on it, but were never able to get back without help.

A couple of years ago, a smart young snip of a relative said to me, "And who were the good dancers in your day? So-and-so, she of course. But who else?" Could I say, "Ike and Em," with all the explanations that weaken strong arguments, and could I say anybody else and leave out Ike and Em? Well, styles change, and we have new ways of dress, new steps, new music.

FROM "CANTERBURY PILGRIMS"

EDWIN FORD PIPER

TUNING-UP

I

Out of a winter dog-sleep into spring
The hamlets rouse: and to the Tabard door
The little silver bells go journeying
Till rustic mane and pad and hackamore
Jostle curvetting ivory and gold.
And Geoffrey hears the rhythmic folk-saw twang
And chitter, while its cultures interfold
On tunes of jig and marvel and harangue.

Farewell to rhetoric and eloquence,
To the high style, the ink-encrusted word;
For measured tones of silken elegance
Let idiom in rough cadences be heard
While informality and humor plead
For speech that shall be cousin to the deed.

II

In wheezings from a Reeve's disordered mouth,
In Gawain voice of youthful courtesy,
Or Miller whiffing under broken drouth
From corny deeps — harmonious comedy;
In foghorn Latin and the jolly crow
Of Friar that yodels, in the muted Cook
Glowering at Harry Baily's *ho-ho-ho*
The sublimating mind — and fun and luck.

Decently, and in order? Rather say,
With grudge motif, with casual insult,
And somersaulting of grotesquerie
Let all the roistering dance of life exult:
No more the dusty cues, the puppet drone,
The jerking string, the dreary monotone.

GEESE FLYING SOUTH

AUGUST W. DERLETH

Neither my grandfather nor my grandmother would go to bed that night. They sat looking at each other and smiling, and all the time my Aunt Cella was getting more nervous. I suspected from the start that the old folks might guess what it was all about. Anyway, I knew from the way he looked that my grandfather didn't think it was natural for the family to be gathered around looking so uneasy.

Aunt Cella had said that something would have to be done about grandmother, who was losing her faculties, losing her mind, Aunt Cella said candidly. We were surprised to hear it, but we thought Aunt Cella ought to know since she lived with the old folks. There we were, every part of the family represented, my grandparents, Aunt Cella, Uncle Burdace, Uncle Frank, and I. My father could not come and sent me instead.

My grandfather sat across the table from my grandmother, one hand resting laxly on his knee, palm upward, the other grasping his cane, fondling the handle gently from time to time. My grandmother sat with her hands clasped in her lap, her dimming eyes fixed on my grandfather, her thin, sharp face slightly pale. Aunt Cella, whose gaunt, hollow eyes seemed to be everywhere at once, kept moving around the room, fidgeting here and there with little things, and my uncles talked to one another and to my grandparents. I sat back and waited for them to do something, or to hint to my grandparents to go to bed. Several times I wished Aunt Cella would stop braiding her hands together and do something else with them.

Uncle Burdace was saying something about blacksmithing in the old days when suddenly my grandmother said, "There's a big flock of geese flying around the house. They're lost. I can hear them."

For a moment no one said anything.

Then Aunt Cella nodded significantly and said, "Now, Ma, if you hear anything, it's probably a dog barking somewhere."

My grandmother looked at Aunt Cella and smiled. Then she said with a very detached air, "No, they're geese. I've heard them often enough before. I can't imagine anyone mistaking a dog's barking for the honking of geese." Then

she settled together a little and looked back at my grandfather.

"I can remember," he said, "how we heard them that night at your brother's place in Eau Claire. All night long. It was a night like this. Dark and rainy."

"Yes," said my grandmother. "I remember that very well."

For a few moments everyone was quiet. Aunt Cella kept nodding dolefully and let her fingers push nervously at her hair, which was straggling down one side of her head.

Then my grandmother said, "There must be near five hundred of them."

Aunt Cella trembled and got up and went out of the room. I followed her. We went outside and stood on the porch, and there, sure enough, were the geese, hundreds of them, flying in circles against the grey sky, so low that we could see them clearly despite the murky night. They were honking confusedly, loudly. Aunt Cella pressed her thin body against the porch rail and looked up at them. She stood there for a while, her face grey in the mist, her eyes dark and lost. She jerked nervously around and looked at me. She didn't say anything.

When we came back to the front room, my grandmother was talking. "Most likely the streetlights are confusing them," she was saying.

"Or perhaps they lost their leader," my grandfather said.

The old folks were talking just to each other; they were ignoring the rest of us as if we weren't there at all. I wondered whether they were doing it on purpose.

"I remember that night in Eau Claire," my grandmother went on, "how low they were that night. Almost right up against the streetlights. And what a noise they made. Pretty near all night, too. My, but that was a sight and a thing to remember."

My grandfather smiled and nodded at her.

"There *are* wild geese," said Aunt Cella with the helpless air of giving the point to grandmother.

"Yes, of course, there are," said my grandmother, very detached.

Aunt Cella looked uncertainly from Uncle Burdace to Uncle Frank. She began to twist her fingers nervously, and a worried look grew on her face.

Uncle Burdace pulled out his watch and looked at it. "Nine-thirty," he said slowly. "A little after already." He looked irritated.

Uncle Frank said something about watches, and Aunt Cella said that nobody could beat grandfather's old watch for accuracy. "What does your watch say, Pa?" she asked.

My grandfather took out his watch and said, "Nine-twenty-nine." Then he put it back into his pocket and looked speculatively out of the window into the glow shed by the streetlight beyond.

"Likely that honking will go on all night," said my grandmother.

My grandfather smiled at her. "I guess it will," he said.

"They don't seem to be flying any too well," my grandmother went on. "Must be they lost their leader. Likely shot. Seems they're making pretty small circles."

"Now, Ma," protested Aunt Cella. "You can't tell that by sitting here. You know you can't. You shouldn't put on that way."

My grandmother looked at her. Her eyes were tired, but she took in Aunt Cella and smiled at her as if she were a little child. "Pa and I have heard wild geese before," she said gently. "Pa and I have heard them lost at night."

"But you can't tell that, Ma," continued Aunt Cella, looking toward my uncles for support. "You can't tell it just by sitting here like this."

"When you've heard wild geese before," continued my grandmother patiently, "you learn their cries, yes you do, and the sounds they make, and what they mean. Your Pa and I have heard them often enough before. It's knowing what they say to each other."

Aunt Cella looked from Uncle Burdace to Uncle Frank. Neither of them said anything. She looked at me and sighed. She made as if to get up but changed her mind.

"I guess I'll go out and watch them," I said.

I went out on the porch and watched the geese wavering around against the dark sky. Sometimes I couldn't see them at all, and sometimes they were whiteish against the black clouds, and sometimes dark against light fleece-like clouds behind which the moon was shining somewhere. They were flying in widening circles, but every little while some of the geese would break the circle and

it would have to be started all over again. They had been following the river down, and they were only about a third of a mile from the river but they couldn't see it because of the lights, which blinded them. They were still honking loudly when I turned and went back into the front room.

My grandmother said, "Well, August, they were flying in circles, weren't they?"

"Ja," I said. "Small circles."

She nodded, smiling. Aunt Cella didn't know what to make of it. I thought of my grandmother's guessing like that and pretty soon it came to me that if the geese had been flying in a straight line in any direction except west, or even in a large circle, they would have got to see the river because the river went around east of the town from the northwest to the southwest.

I began to smile, too, and my grandmother looked at me and her eyes twinkled.

Aunt Cella got up and began to move nervously about; she went into an adjoining room and stood there for a while in the dark. Uncle Burdace said something under his breath and went to the telephone and called up my Aunt Josephine to say that he would be home pretty soon, but if he was delayed, she shouldn't worry about it.

Uncle Frank pulled out his watch and said, "After ten already. My, but you two are keeping late hours." He said this jokingly, but he sounded anxious.

My grandmother said, "I remember once your Pa and I stayed up for two nights in a row and weren't tired enough to speak of the third night. That was at the World's Fair in Chicago, I guess."

My grandfather nodded.

Uncle Frank's face fell, and he looked at Uncle Burdace, and together the two of them looked at Aunt Cella.

"It isn't always," my grandmother went on, "that we can have our children around us like this, is it, Pa?"

"No, I guess not," my grandfather said.

I had the feeling that they were laughing behind their faces.

"My, how those geese do honk," my grandmother said suddenly. "I remember one night before we were married, Pa, when we got caught in a shower at Grell's Mill, how we heard the geese go honking by over us, and how they honked and honked. I remember that we sat in the buggy under that old elm tree right near the bridge, remember that, Pa?"

"I remember it well," said my grandfather.

"And how the rain let up after a while," my grandmother went on. "I remember after I was home that night how I heard the geese flying over all night long. Cold weather came right after — a long spell."

My grandfather nodded and smiled and my grandmother nodded and smiled, and they looked at each other, saying nothing. I began to feel rather foolish.

"I'm going outside for a cigarette," I said.

I went out on the porch again. The geese were still flying endlessly around. If there were five hundred of them before, there were over a thousand now. They were flying this way and that, around and across, hopelessly mixed up. Their honking came louder because there were more of them. The rain had stopped and the leaves on the ground smelled richly. There was a faint smell of burning leaves, of smudge smoke, in the air, too. The moon was coming a little clearer behind the thinning clouds. If it came out, the geese might be able to find the river again. I went back into the front room after I had finished the cigarette.

"What a noise they make!" I said into the silent room.

"There'll be no sleep for most of us tonight," said my grandmother. "I've been woke up every year now by the geese flying south in fall. I got so I expect them."

Suddenly Uncle Frank pulled out his watch again and said, "I guess I'll make that ten-forty train."

Aunt Cella jumped and said, "But, Frank!" She looked hopelessly at my grandparents.

Uncle Frank looked at her irritably and said, "I got business to attend to. Anyway, I promised Ella and the kids I'd be home tonight."

My grandfather said, "You hardly come but you go. I kind of thought you might take Cella with you for a week or so. She needs a rest, running her legs off for us all the time. A week in Milwaukee would do her good."

Aunt Cella looked at my grandfather as if she had not heard right.

"That's right," said Uncle Frank. "You ought to go out more, Cella."

"Why, you know I can't," said Aunt Cella indignantly.

My grandparents looked at each other.

Uncle Burdace got up and went out into the kitchen. Aunt Cella went after him, closing the door behind her. They began to talk heatedly. "Pa's right," said Uncle Burdace. "What you need's a rest, Cella."

Uncle Frank got up and opened the door and went into the kitchen. I heard Uncle Burdace say, "I'll drive you down to the station, Frank."

My grandparents looked at each other and smiled.

"Well, I guess we can go to bed, mother," my grandfather said.

My grandmother turned to me and said, "August, open the window a little."

I got up and opened the window.

"My, but I like to hear those geese honking," she said.

MAN ALONE

RICHARD MILLER

A world which does not exist envelops us. Accustomed to looking for life in a pattern of our own making, we cannot see forms at variance, or dare not. It is all deception, but there is a glamour, sometimes, in the pattern; that which evades us is unknown, unthinkable.

This would be all; there would be no conflict, no story, but the deception fails.

The road-way is not paved. There is a raised, board side-walk. Grass and weeds stick up through the cracks. The warm wind blows, swing-

ing the old-fashioned, overhanging street-lamp, and moving the grass and the weeds, and the scrawny poplars that stand along the way. There is no moon; there is darkness around the small circle in which the man stands.

The man's face is a mask; it means nothing; deep feelings kill unostentatiously.

He is about to go on. The third house there is his destination. He once lived in it. It is empty now. The pattern that he has — with much labor, although inadvertently — pieced out against the world that does exist, is cracking like a picture puzzle lifted however gently.

Life moves fast; faster than vision, faster than words; faster than thought. Pleasure depends upon the destruction of the sense of time, but time may be left out and pleasure still be wanting. A man who has worked hard for twenty years does not really like to see himself standing and looking at the place from which he started. There is power in a place to cut out a stretch of time and to make it a flimsy unreality.

"I was here. I am here." There is only a change of tense between, and the dominant thought is neither past nor present, but is hollowly timeless, presenting the deadly collocation, "I" and "here", repeated uselessly.

The painful secretion of success had gradually exhausted the central organism.

When the position was finally established, insofar as a position can be said to be established, the man who had fought for it was gone. It was not that he was no longer interested; it was not that he no longer valued such measure of success as seemed possible to him; nor that he could no longer combat.

He was suddenly afraid. The city about him began to withdraw into a dangerous field where memories of facts and places were confused with memories of hopes and intentions, and with memories of invincible determinations. Chance meetings on street-corners where old buildings used to be, became, when recalled, intimations of the recency and the impermanence of newer situations. Slight angles of doubt loomed disproportionately. Nothing continued tangible in his world. His friends, their friends, and the activities of all of them, while perfectly real in contact, became visionary in retrospect, not taking root, or, rather, not permitting root to be taken. Life was comfortable, and pleasing, even beautiful at moments, with a dizzy, macadamized beauty; there was work to be done; he was busy, and he was not failing even at a time when so many about him were falling off the dubious transport of an imaginary prosperity. At home was convenience, even a modest degree of luxury, security, and a quiet exclusion of much of the ugliness inherent in existence. Muriel had left, of course, but that incident was closed. The apartment was somehow more homelike since her departure. The memory of her presence could sometimes diffuse a spirit of companionship which her presence had never afforded. She had been in too much of a hurry. He had been climbing fast; but she had been climbing faster, and had gone on. It was not that that had

drawn him down and away from the course he had been following without failure for years and years. It was something else — a loss worse than that. It was the terrible fading of reality; the horrible conviction of being uprooted from something that was vitally necessary. It came first as a feeling most like homesickness; a depressing longing to be in some place where the sights and the sounds and the very smells would be familiar to old associations of the senses, engendering the essentially religious comfort of being at home in the world.

Now the warm wind of the spring night stirs the particular brew of grasses and weeds and trees above the damp red earth between the old boards, and heavy magic from a privet hedge in the darkness beyond. The sound of the wind, with the complex odor it stirs, has an identity and a reality.

He can be aware of the fitness of his shadow on the worn boards and across the untended grass. There is no disparity. The attachment is real. Starved roots creep out for nourishment.

A man is at home in the world of his forefathers.

The way the thin little roots, long-pinchd live things, reached for the sustenance outside in this atmosphere was more frightening than it was gratifying. He looked at his shoes. Such shoes had never stood on that board side-walk. Red clay was not for them.

Fear, shame, guilt, remorse, pain, hatred, and malice and envy are warm and comforting to have. They may leap and dance in the heart, or they may crouch in a corner and gnaw; but if they are there, they are there. Worse than all of these is the sallow, unmanifesting curse, emptiness.

"I knew it would be like this."

He lied to himself. Without specific hope, perhaps, but still without any such prescience, he had come willy-nilly, drawn back not by a desire to be there, but by an overmastering growth of horror at the unfamiliarity of other places.

But such shoes had never stood on that sidewalk, on those boards; and the incongruity of splotches of red clay on the sides of those shoes was arresting.

If there had been any person or persons to come back to, it would have been different, for a preoccupation with the bitter disappointments of renewing outlived acquaintanceships would have overlaid the fundamental hostility of the elements of the place. The hostility that he could feel in

the physical surroundings was not an active threatening danger, but it was the sometimes more deadly revenge of non-recognition. At no point did the elements of the little scene open their mysterious arms to receive him. The roots went out, and found nothing, and went further, and found nothing.

The wages of sin is death, and, if there be any verity in the observation, the best works are paid for, at the end of the job, in the same inflexible token. Death is detachment.

The wind blew by.

" . . . come and sit by my side if you love me. . . ."

Muriel would not have known the song. No one, male or female, whom Muriel knew would have known the song. The very rhythm of it would have thrown her out of time with the progress of her own life, which was keyed to some deep inner cacophony too fast for rhythm. She moved as electrically — smoothly, efficiently, with no backward glance to make her unsteady as she worked along the upward spiral of her acquisitions. Basically vulgar, her excessive refinements made their course over a bed of difficulties which never seemed to arise; she was untroubled by a thought.

He was going to go back to the city the next day; back to the office; back to work — there was work to do — with some new strength gained by even so brief an outing free from work and worry, by even so brief a contact with a familiarly remembered world of vital nourishment.

But he was repudiated.

The world of a man's forefathers is a home for him who needs it, and he who needs it cannot have it; it will not have him. The world that is coming is the proper home of man, and the world that has gone does not now exist for those whom it most sadly envelops.

The increasing complication of order within order athwart order within order sustaining institutions propagating systems organizing order within order athwart order within order sustaining

. . .
Toward chaos.

" . . . It was good for Paul and Silas,
And it's good enough for me. . . ."

You can't go back now. You can only turn around and look back; you can't go back now.

Well, I have organized a holding corporation to hold a holding corporation holding a corporation incorporated to handle the profits of the

corporation incorporated by me and by my associates and which has been successful in the manufacture and distribution both in this country and in wide foreign markets in the face of extraordinary and often unfair competition, a success largely due to the foresight and methods of my own policy which has its logical culmination in the organization of a holding corporation to hold a corporation holding the whole.

That smooth-soled shoe won't hold a footing in that red clay.

Reality is always tangible.

There might be iron in that red clay. It might be worth investigating, at some time when the press of business was not quite so urgent as now.

There are men in that red clay.

He walked past three lots on to the house he had come to see. The house was unoccupied. The grass in the front yard was tall and full of weeds. The yard and house had shrunk. They had once been very big; now they were pinched and cramped. Years before, they had been very big; they had remained so, clearly, familiarly, until just now. A visit to establish contact had netted a strangeness and a shrinkage, and the dubious comfort of looking upon the dead. The front porch was sagging. The screens had rotted away. There was a bitter look of uselessness sinking in reality.

The next train left at ten o'clock. He walked fast. He ran. He did not want to see the house. He did not want to go in and step up on the porch. As he ran, the thin soles of his shoes beat a hollow and awkward dance on the resonant elevated boards of the old walk-way. He did not want to see the place again. He did not want to smell that hedge and grass and clay and weeds in the warm wind of the spring night.

A man cannot go from one world into another overnight, nor by wishing, but only by years of learning, and bit by bit; even then, the center of the man cannot go from one world into another, but only the outer layers of the career that is secreted, painfully, exhausting the center. There are gestures that bear the stigmata of insincerity because they are rare and authentic, the fleeting motions of an unhappy old urge to crack the pattern and to look behind at that which exists.

A man cannot go two ways at once. A world which does not exist envelops us. The pattern must not be lifted, however gently.

On the train, he slept soundly; something was settled; there was no place to go.

SPRING IN THIS TOWN

LOREN C. EISELEY

They shove the cloud-scraping beauty of steel at the moon now.
Poets find words for the wheel's flight and the locked power at the turbine's heart
Troubles men into song.

Out of the roaring and implacable heart a song for a handful,
The hundred with almost ordinary faces,
Eating strength, drawing power, in their delicate, idle fingers,
From a myriad warped bodies, the work tortured hands.

They write poems to the thrust of steel now, the phallic
Symbol of the rich seed, the iron harvest
Sprouting higher than wheat.

It is spring in this town.

To the sodden faces on the porches of company-owned shacks
The smell of the stock yards comes a little stronger . . .
In the grass by the railroad only a few hoboes
Turn slowly and feel the sun on their backs.

TOBE SNOW

LEO L. WARD

Tobe Snow went back to the time before the railroad, but you never could think of Tobe as coming to Prairie Green. You could only think of Tobe as being there from the beginning and the town growing up around him. Prairie Green had always needed Tobe Snow. He was marshal now — had been the town marshal for the last fifteen years. Before that he had been barkeep, and then harness maker.

Tobe was the kind of man who had never searched out opportunities. He didn't need to. His chances always came, soon or late. And in nothing more truly than talking. Tobe always had his say, and it was always the last say. He knew he was the best talker in Prairie Green. And though Prairie Green sometimes wagged its head and grinned, it also knew it. No man had ever grinned directly into Tobe Snow's face.

Usually he went around silent and tight-lipped, looking at Prairie Green, waiting till it was entirely ready to listen. He seldom wasted himself

on small audiences. Some of the farmers tried to draw him out when they met him on the street on rainy days. But he would look at most of them as if they were utter strangers, with almost the same look that he gave to tramps and suspicious characters. Even Josh Bowdin, the big cattleman, never got more than a few words from him. And there was the time Josh asked him how long he thought the dry weather would last. Josh just stopping on the street and pushing back his wide hat, and asking the question in his big neighborly way. Tobe had said he wasn't even interested in dry weather. Said he was only thinking about when the rain would come. Everybody heard about it and used it on Josh for years, especially the farmers whenever Josh went out to buy their cattle.

But Tobe would talk when his words ran no danger of being wasted, when Prairie Green became entirely silent and respectful. This happened a few times a year, of winter evenings usually,

back behind the big round stove in Allison's Hardware Store. Tobe never talked much to Herb Allison personally. He just nodded whenever he went past the store.

But on bad winter evenings Tobe would come into the store mysteriously. He'd shake the snow off just inside the door, like a ghost suddenly stepping out of his sheets. Then he would come back through the store, saying nothing, and sit down. He always took the chair in the corner, unless Joker Harvey was there before him. Joker Harvey was a good talker too. He was the local butcher, and a physical giant, with a face that was merely a mouth in a great round clot of reddened beard.

Tobe Snow sat low in his chair, as if only half listening to the other men about the stove. His faded colorless overcoat was fastened up under his chin by a tremendous horse-blanket safety pin. Almost the only things you noticed about Tobe were his eyes, and his ears, which protruded, large and long, from under the shapeless hat that was jammed low onto his head. The small black pipe sticking out of his thin gray beard was insignificant, and Tobe never seemed to pay any attention to it. His eyes were only two watery beads. He hardly seemed to need them. Somehow you felt that he saw everything without looking at it, just as he heard the men talking around him without listening.

Perry Lawson, who owned the new elevator, was talking about the prices of grain. Tobe was apparently paying no attention, as if he knew that Lawson was mistaken. Somebody asked Lawson if he ever found out for sure about how the fire in the old elevator started. The men went on talking about the fire, speaking of how the grain kept burning for over a week. Tobe's eyes now became fastened on the coal bucket. Whenever anyone spat at the bucket and hit it squarely, his eyes widened as if in half-conscious surprise. A grin was coming, stronger and stronger, on his face.

Suddenly his gray face lifted, and he looked up over the stove toward the front of the store, his eyes shining against the darkness of the corner behind him. The men stopped talking. Tobe waited till everything was quite silent. The faces of all the men turned toward him. He was still looking toward the front of the store as if waiting for a signal. At last his mouth pushed out in a slow, satisfied pucker, and he began.

I

"You fellers don't remember it," he said very

slowly and evenly, in a high cracked voice, "It was away before your time. But there was a fire here at Prairie Green once that ud make your elevator look like a match aburnin' in the broad daylight."

The men glanced at each other across the stove. They had heard Tobe tell this story a few times before — on winter evenings like this, when he had risen to one of his rare great moments of talk. But no one smiled openly. They all looked back at Tobe with a show of eagerness. Joker Harvey even sat up in his chair with a long heaving effort of his huge body. Tobe looked around the circle and held the stub of his pipe before him with rhetorical suspense.

"It was the year after the railroad went through," he said as steadily as before. "I was barkeep in Nick Dodge's saloon. Nick was the best man ever came to Prairie Green. Me and him licked a dozen whippersnappers once. Licked 'em to a frazzle. They came into the saloon, agoin' to paint things up. Nick never'd stand for that. So me and him just laid 'em on the floor, one after another. Then I watched the place while Nick whipped 'em clean out a town. Whipped 'em right out a town with a black snake. That's the kind of feller Nick Dodge was."

Tobe looked down at the coal bucket for a few moments, in eloquent modesty, or in memorial respect for the name of Nick Dodge. Then he went on. "Well, I was barkeep for Nick, and it was the year after the railroad went through. Dryest year I ever seed. Never did rain that summer. Everything was just like paper. Then one day didn't there a fire start on the railroad. Out on the prairie. And a hot wind blowin' too, right out of the southwest. That fire just spread out and kept a spreadin'. Of course it came straight for town. You could see it out there, comin' too fast even to make hardly any smoke. Only just red devils of flames leapin' and jumpin' everywhere, and comin' faster 'n a pack of wild horses. You didn't have time to do nothin'. Up to the ring of safety furrows at the edge of town before you knew it. And it came right over them safety furrows. Caught in some trees a dude feller had around his house out there. A feller that was here on the railroad. A kind of manager feller that was runnin' the railroad when it first come. Little trees he had planted around his house out at the edge of town. Even the trees was all dried up that summer. And then there wasn't any stoppin' it. Came right up through

the town. Catchin' on roofs. Houses goin' up faster than brush piles. Only it seemin' to leap clear over some a the houses that were kind a off to themselves. And that fire, comin' like it did, course it wasn't goin' to spread back and catch 'em when it missed 'em once. Few of the houses saved that way. But the people, they was runnin' every which way, tryin' to keep out a the fire. Just plumb crazy, all of 'em. I seed somethin' had to be done right off. Nobody doin' nothin' but runnin' for his hide. Course I was thinkin' specially of women and children. I seed the fire was gettin' right into the business places along the street here by that time. So I had to think mighty fast. And all at once I hit on an idea. Nick Dodge had a lot of beer down at the station. Just shipped in. Not even unloaded yet. About twenty or thirty barrel anyway. Or maybe more'n that. Maybe fifty barrel. Anyways, I went out and got hold of Nick. Course he said to do it afore I got it half said. So Nick and I just collared everybody and herded 'em onto the railroad tracks. Down past where the depot is now. Well, we took them barrels and rolled 'em right down the tracks to where all the people were. And then when the fire came down there we just broke all them barrels with axes and pieces of railroad iron and anything we could get our hands on. And we poured that beer right off down the slope of the railroad grade where the fire was comin' right up through the grass toward the tracks. And that beer just drowned all that fire. Put it right out all along the track where the people were. Seemed like that fire backed right off from that beer. And so, there was me and Nick, standin' there watchin' the fire, and it agoin' off across the town, right away from the railroad. Didn't leave hardly anything. Swoopin' buildings up like they was only match boxes. Leavin' just a few houses and stores. And Nick Dodge's saloon. The fire just kind a jumped around the saloon. But the old depot, it went up in one blaze, seemed like. That's the way all the buildin's went. One or two big whoopin' puffs, and they were gone. Hardly give a man time to see it. Not enough smoke to tell you which way the wind was blowin'. Just big flames, one after another, goin' up before you could blink and look at 'em twice. Before we knew it the whole town practically gone, like as if it had never been here. And that's what me and Nick and the people was alookin' at from there on the tracks above where we poured that beer out a all them barrels."

Tobe's voice had become gradually deeper and slower before he stopped talking. He looked at two or three of the faces about him with eloquent finality. His face was a grinning, triumphant challenge. No one said anything for a few moments. Every face was fixed toward Tobe. He saw the shine of several pairs of eyes, and became apparently satisfied. His eyes dropped to the coal bucket, and his face became extremely solemn and grave.

"Well, what was we to do?" Tobe asked, in a low, helpless tone. "There was all them people bereft of all they had. Actin' like a bunch of children. Acryin' and talkin' senseless. And some of 'em just starin', like they'd lost their voices as well as their senses. Well, me and Nick Dodge got together there on the tracks off away from the others, and then we started to figurin'. It would be a good two months afore snow u'd fly, near as we could figure. We thought we'd ought to be able to do somethin'. Then I hit on an idea. Nick liked the idea right away. So, we just flagged the next freight. Big through train it was. He didn't like to stop, but he did. And we told him we wanted a few box cars. Three or four of 'em. We wanted them for the winter. We'd rent 'em, and Nick told him he'd pay what was reasonable. Nick's word was good as gold, and everybody knew him, even the railroad people. Well, the very next day in come the box cars. They dropped four of them in on the siding. We went to work on 'em right off. Partitioned them and made 'em tight and snug with grass and clay. Didn't take long, only about a week or two. We fixed up a couple of houses too, out of a lot of pieces we found after the fire. Not very good, but we made 'em tight with a lot of grass and clay. And then Nick, he took two families into the saloon. Anyways, we were all ready by the time frost came. And we got through the winter one way and another. Only a couple or three died. Sickly. Old people they were. Probably would a died anyway."

Tobe stopped, and looked down at the coal bucket as before. When Joker Harvey leaned over and hit the bucket with a little resounding splash, Tobe was not this time surprised at all. He didn't even seem to notice it. His little bony face was beaming now. He seemed to be looking at things more real than the coal bucket and its tobacco stains.

Tobe moved in his chair, shifting his chin in his overcoat collar. "Then," he said very abruptly,

"in the spring we all pitched in. Got lumber from a mill down on the river. Nick Dodge got two span a mules. Started haulin' lumber from a mill down on the river. Then we went to buildin'. Built about a dozen houses, I reckon. Jesse Marsh even put up a grocery store. Even fixed up a school. A kind a side room on Jesse's store, it was. Jesse's wife taught there first, about six weeks every winter. And that's the way Prairie Green started up again. All brand new. Startin' up, before the fire'd cooled off hardly. That's the way we did things when Nick Dodge was here, runnin' his saloon down on the corner there. And me akeepin' bar for him till he up and died the year the grasshoppers came. And there ain't no man can as much as look like his shadder ever since. And that's what I know about Nick Dodge, and me his own barkeep that's sayin' it too."

Tobe Snow stood up slowly. He jabbed the pipe into his mouth, as if it had suddenly become hot in his hand. He glowered down at the faces about the stove, his brows arching slightly, as if he disdained to say another word. He stood more and more erect, drawing himself deliberately away from the men. At last, turning abruptly, he went off toward the front of the store, his gaze fixed as if on the very doorknob itself. As he went out into the whirling snow, he slammed the door behind him. His hat and shoulders showed dimly against the big plate glass window and then were gone.

II

Whenever Josh Bowdin was in the store, Tobe would be sure to tell the story about the famous set of whang harness. This was usually in late March, on one of those long wet nights when the winter was breaking up. Josh would always return to Prairie Green about this time, after a winter trip down to Missouri for mules, or sometimes to Texas after a few loads of steers. Tobe liked to see Josh back in town, though he never said as much to anybody, and least of all to Josh. Josh would always come back some day in March, wearing his corduroys and big boots, and his wide gray hat pushed far back on his head. And his big booming voice would fill the street, talking and laughing with the farmers and the men in the doorways of the stores. But Tobe would hardly pay any attention to him. He would just walk on down the street, as if he wasn't interested. Tobe had heard the men around town talking about what he had once told Josh about the dry weather. As long as Prairie Green kept remembering that,

Tobe wouldn't have to say much more to Josh Bowdin when he was on the street here the first day he was back from Missouri or Texas. He could just wait till evening. Josh would be sure to be in the hardware store the first night after he was back. And Tobe had never missed coming to the store the night after Josh came back from buying mules and steers.

The men would be there around the stove, listening to Josh's great rich voice and laughing with him about the way Missouri mules acted when you tried to get them into cattle cars. Tobe would always come in about nine o'clock. He would come all the way back through the store and sit down without saying anything, paying no attention to anybody, apparently not noticing Josh at all or hearing his talk or his laughter. The big grin would leave Josh's face. He would go on, talking very seriously now, almost solemnly, about contrary mules and wild Texas cattle. At last he'd get up, lean over the stove, and spit into the coal bucket. While settling back into his chair, he would look over at Tobe and with a slow smile, say, "Well, Tobe, glad to be back with you again." Josh would go on packing tobacco into a pipe then, the smile deepening into his lowered face. He was the only man in Prairie Green that dared to greet Tobe Snow like that.

Tobe, all the while gazing into the coal bucket, seemed hardly to have heard what Josh had said. Everyone was silent now. The men kept looking half-furtively at Tobe, but nobody except Josh Bowdin was ever smiling openly. A sly twinkle seemed to be coming slowly into Tobe's abstracted eyes. At last the little black pipe came out of his mouth, and he began to speak down to the coal bucket, very deliberately and evenly, as if hardly caring whether the others heard him or not. His face seemed to be filled with complete disdain for everything except the coal bucket and his own thoughts. Only there was a peculiar tilt to Tobe's head tonight, a lighter movement of his bearded mouth and chin, and the slightest brightness in his gray watery eyes. There was something gay about him as he started to speak, something which he was keeping to himself, hiding it behind his small withered face and under the deliberate evenness of his voice.

"You boys don't remember a span of mules that was once in this town," Tobe was saying. "None of you don't remember anything about 'em. They didn't come from Missouri either. Came from Ohio. Jack Bowdin brought 'em in here." Tobe

never mentioned the fact that Jack Bowdin, one of his contemporaries, was Josh Bowdin's uncle. Josh and the younger generation never seemed to deserve such recognition. And as Tobe stopped for a moment, looking more intently before him, he seemed to be remembering things about Jack and the mules which it would be no use telling to the men about him, things that belonged to himself alone. His withered throat moved up and down for a few moments, like a man chuckling deep within himself, quite noiselessly.

"Well, them mules wasn't any bigger'n oversize jackrabbits. They was thin, scrawny looking mules. Them stub tails a theirs looked almost as big around as their bellies. Everybody was laughin' at Jack Bowdin. Jack brought 'em in here for haulin' lumber for the new schoolhouse. Haulin' it from away down on the river. Mighty long hard haul, too. But Jack just let 'em laugh. He knowed what he was doin', gettin' them mules. They had big necks, and they was pullin' fools, that's what they was. Pullinest things I ever seed inside a set of tugs.

"Well, I was makin' harness then. Had my shop over where the postoffice is now. When I saw Jack takin' them mules out that first day, startin' for the river, I had to laugh. They didn't look no bigger 'n a couple a lean dogs, trottin' down the street in front of the long set of runnin' gears. Their harness lookin' like it was about four times too big for them. You'd just think every minute they'd step into their own collars and stumble down on top a themselves right there in the street. But there they went. Jack had brass mounted harness on them too, stickin' away up above 'em like poles. That was the way Jack was. Ridin' along on the runnin' gears, standin' away up above the mules, payin' no attention to anybody.

"Then, it wasn't hardly noon yet, and Jack came back to town. But he didn't have a stick a lumber. Not a plank. He was walkin' behind the mules, not even any runnin' gears. He came around to the shop, drivin' the mules afoot. And what do you suppose it was? It was one of them mules' tugs. Snapped off as clean as you ever see. And Jack agrinnin'. Just agrinnin', and hardly sayin' anything. So I spliced the tug for him. Made it double. Took me half the afternoon. But I made it double, and stout as I could.

"The next day Jack went down to the river again. But about noon, here he comes again, without a plank of lumber, runnin' gears, or any-

thing. Up to the shop he comes, and there was the other mule and his tug snapped in two clean as you please. And Jack grinnin' more 'n ever. Sayin' nothin', but just grinnin', and proud a them mules — so proud he'd have been willin' for 'em to tear their harness till there wouldn't have been two straps hangin' together. Several fellers from around town came down there. They couldn't believe their eyes. The same fellers that had been laughin' at Jack for gettin' the mules.

"So I said to Jack, just kind of jokin', I said, why don't you get a set of whang harness. You know what whang is. It ought to be tough enough. Of course I said it, never thinkin'. All the boys laughed, and looked at Jack.

"But Jack didn't laugh very much. Just kept grinnin' and lookin' at the mules. Then he looked down at the ground, and started to studyin', and still agrinnin'. After a while he looked up, and what'd he do but tell me to make the harness. Said that's just what he wanted. A set of whang harness. Of course we all laughed. But that didn't make no difference. He said that's what he wanted. Whang harness. At least whang tugs. And him still agrinnin', only kind of sly, and talkin' straight to me.

"I asked him if he knew what whang'd do when it got wet. I told him a set of whang tugs would stretch a mile. But that didn't make no difference at all. He only said he wanted whang and nothin' else. Sayin' it kind of sly, I thought. But sober as a judge.

"So I made the tugs for him. Half the boys in town comin' around and laughin' and watchin' me. Sewed 'em several thicknesses, tight as I could. Took me all that afternoon and part of the next mornin'. And so out goes Jack, him and the mules, and them new yaller tugs danglin' over their backs, almost adraggin' the ground. And everybody standin' around, laughin' and hollerin' at him. But him hardly payin' any attention at all. Keepin' things to himself, grinnin' just a little, almost as sober as the mules.

"Of course everybody waited to see what'd happen. They didn't hardly know what to look for. Some was sayin' he would make it. And some was sayin' he wouldn't. And some was talkin' about the bad place in the road out south a town. And some was lookin' at the sky just awishin' and ahopin' it'd rain.

"Well, sure enough, about four o'clock it did start rainin'. Clouded up in no time, without no warnin', just like it was watchin' the time and de-

cidin' all at once. Got mighty dark. And then it came all of a sudden. Just pourin' down. Everybody standin' in the doors and lookin' out at it and grinnin'. Everybody in town talkin' about Jack Bowdin and them whang tugs.

"Well, it kept on rainin', it must have been about an hour. Everybody still astandin' along the street, back inside the open doors, just waitin'. Just waitin' and standin' there."

Tobe's voice had stopped abruptly and jerkily. His mouth remained slightly open, as if he had lost control of his voice. But something like a crafty smile came into the rest of his face. His eyes were sharp and observant as they went slowly and deliberately around the circle of faces beside the stove. His gaze fastened on Josh Bowdin.

Tobe got slowly up from his chair. The little black pipe was lifted before him, stiffly, in a gesture of suspense, the stem pointed at Josh. Tobe's watery eyes contracted to glittering beads as he looked down intently over the pipe at Bowdin. The faint smile was now gone from Tobe's face. He became very serious as he started speaking in a low, solemn tone.

"Then, what did we see?" Tobe stopped, and his eyes went slowly and rhetorically from face to face of the men beside the stove. He looked down at Josh Bowdin again. "What did we see, all at once, out there in the street? We seed Jack Bowdin and them mules, that's what we seed. And him awalkin' out aside the mules, drivin' 'em steady and slow right through the rain. But that was all, just Jack and them mules. Not a sign of any lumber, not a wagon wheel behind 'em."

After another short period of silence, Tobe went on, speaking now with an air of solemn mystery. "And next thing everybody knowed, the rain stopped. All at once, just like it begun. And there was Jack Bowdin and them mules up there in front of the school house, the mules leanin' into their collars a little, and Jack holdin' a steady line on 'em. And out behind 'em, there was them whang tugs, stretchin' all the way along the street, straight as a die clean out to the end of town, and nobody knowin' how much further."

Tobe seemed to draw slightly back from the men in the chairs, then stood there watching them. He pulled his bent old body up to its full height. His small face seemed exultant, yet self-possessed. His thin brows were arched in suspense. His little eyes shone almost fiercely, yet secretly, mysteriously. Never had Tobe Snow seemed so elo-

quent, so unembarrassed, so sure of himself, as he waited now, looking steadily down at the men.

At last he dropped his head slightly, almost patronizingly. "Well," he said, "what do you suppose everybody did? They didn't do nothin', that's what they did. Just kept starin' and starin', like they was wonderin' whether to believe their eyes. Lookin' at Jack and them mules and them tugs stretchin' all the way back along the street.

"Then all at once, the sun come out. Come out strong, just blazin' down. Started dryin' things up. Just dried things up in no time. Pretty soon there wasn't even any mud left in the street. Then them whang tugs, they started to gettin' dry. Not so black and shiny like they was. But gettin' yellower and yellower all the time. Then, just all at once they was dry. Then a course they started shortenin' up. Losin' their stretch and gettin' shorter and shorter. Then, sudden like, everybody heard it, away out at the edge of town. And the first thing everybody knowed, there it was comin' up the street. Jack Bowdin's wagon, all by itself, and a big load a lumber on it. It acomin' right straight up the street. Wabblin' a little, but pretty straight too, its spring tongue stayin' up stiff off the ground. It kept comin' and comin'. It went all the way along the street, right on to where the mules and Jack was. Jack ran around and grabbed the tongue, and he steered it slap into the ring on the neckyoke. And there it was, that load of lumber, astandin' there beside where they was buildin' the school house. Right there in the street, real as daylight. A big whoppin' load too. And them mules out in front of it, not even breathin' hard. And there was Jack up on the wagon already, astartin' to unload that lumber."

Tobe Snow drew himself up, and looked down haughtily at the men in the chairs. Plainly, now, he was putting on a pose, and not trying to hide it. There was something purposeful and rhetorical about it. The faint crafty smile came back into his face. He leaned over slightly, his gaze fixed upon Josh Bowdin. "That there's how Jack Bowdin worked mules in the old days," he said, "And they wasn't Missouri mules neither." He added this with a sour grin. Now he looked down at the men in malevolent triumph. The crafty grin spread wide and tight across his small face as he withdrew his head slowly behind the collar of his old coat.

Tobe Snow turned and walked steadily toward the front of the store. The faces of all the silent men were lifted up from their chairs, to watch

him. The bang of the front door came crashing back through the store. Tobe's face stopped and turned for a furtive moment at the plate-glass window, then disappeared in the darkness.

III

It was late April. Two nights before, thieves had come in a truck to the Widow Murphy's farm out south of town, and had boldly hauled twenty-two hogs out of a small rye field where they were pasturing. Since then it had been the whole talk of the town. The sheriff had been down from the county seat, and had left again for a small stockyard far down state, from which he had received a clue regarding the hogs. Rosy Murphy had insisted on herself going with him and the deputy, to identify the hogs. They had driven away only this morning in the sheriff's Ford sedan.

There had been heavy rains, and an unusual number of farmers were in town this afternoon. Everywhere along the street, little groups of men were talking about the Widow Murphy's hogs.

Tobe Snow went along the sidewalk, seeming to pay no attention to all this. His small face under the old hat and his whole body appeared to be bent on something directly in front of him. He walked without the least appearance of hurry, but as with a deliberate, very fixed purpose. He was making his regular afternoon round, and was now on his way to the pump-house, to oil up the two big gas engines that would be forcing fresh water into the red tower tank during the early part of the night. Tobe seemed to hear none of the talk of the men as he went on down the sidewalk. When Josh Bowdin, from a larger group in front of the hardware store, saluted him heartily but respectfully, he hardly nodded. For the past two days Tobe had shown no signs of caring, or for that matter, of even knowing, anything about Rosy Murphy's hogs.

Tobe had made only one comment on the whole affair. It had been a single curt remark, made under his breath, and strictly to himself. He had been going one of his rounds this morning, just as the sheriff and his deputy and Rosy Murphy were leaving town. He had seen them as they pulled out of the gas station. He had seen the Widow Murphy sitting, rigid and vehement, in the back seat, her little black hat perched confidently on top of her head. Tobe had seen her just for a moment, in a single glance, as the Ford had turned into the street. He had said, simply, "That woman, atryin' to catch hog thieves!" Glowering after

the car as it went out of the town, he had chuckled once or twice, and then gone on down the street.

It was one of Tobe's philosophical habits never to have anything to do with women, especially never to listen to one of them talking. He had never heard Rosy Murphy explain the motives of her life, as she had done repeatedly, to several men in the community. He did not know that she was simply trying to keep things about her place just the same as they had been when Michael J. Murphy was alive. He did not know Rosy Murphy's unbounded respect for the dead. But it was not only because of this misunderstanding that he was entirely indifferent to all the talk of the men on the sidewalk this afternoon. Tobe Snow would also have his own inscrutable reasons. Evidently he was simply biding his time to speak. Amidst all this hubbub he was keeping himself to himself, and his mouth shut, until Prairie Green would be rational and respectful enough to listen.

As the afternoon ended, the farmers drifted out of town, in their wagons and muddy Fords. Then the dusk came gradually. The street became silent. Talk seemed suspended everywhere. It was as if all Prairie Green had become hushed and expectant, waiting only for the news of Rosy Murphy's hogs.

Not until darkness had come, and lights appeared here and there along the street, did men gather again to begin talking, slowly and quietly as if they must somehow beguile a long night of waiting.

The group in Allison's hardware store was unusually large tonight. Four or five farmers had straggled in, with tense, serious faces. J. P. Cass, the President of the superannuated local Horse Thief Detective Association, was there, waiting for a wire from the sheriff. They were keeping the depot open tonight, to get the wire as soon as it came through. J. P. Cass owned a half-section of the best land in the county, a few miles north of town. He had been county auditor once, about ten years ago.

The talk in the store seemed slow and measured tonight. Every word was given thoughtful, deliberate emphasis. It wasn't merely that the presence of J. P. Cass made the men hesitate about saying too much, though they did look up intently whenever he spoke. But chiefly, everybody simply felt the seriousness of the matter. It was a time for few words and serious responsibility.

Joker Harvey, the butcher, half sitting against a roll of woven wire, had said something about

their sending the thieves up for a good long term, twenty years or more — life, if he could have his say about it. Josh Bowdin was talking about the chances of identifying the hogs once they were mixed or scattered in any stock yards. This had a special interest for Josh, he being a stock-buyer, and he talked across to J. P. Cass in a confident though respectful tone. J. P. Cass, looking down at his toe, and then up toward the front of the store as if expecting somebody to arrive with the wire from the sheriff, and then back down at his toe, had only said, very solemnly and ominously, that if this kind of thing wasn't stopped right off, there was no telling where it would end. Herb Allison, the hardware merchant, floating here and there about the edges of the circle of men, had remarked two or three times about the boldness of it all. And one of the farmers had taken his hat off, rubbed his head, and said flatly that the two hands out at the Murphy place had been ready to remove the hogs from the rye field to a pasture beside the barn the very next day after the hogs were taken. Perry Lawson, the grain man, had spoken in his soft suave voice about how sorry he was to see the whole thing happen, and especially to a widow woman like Mrs. Murphy.

The door opened, and the men all looked toward the front of the store. It was Tobe Snow. As he came back through the store, there seemed to be something unusual about him. He wore the inevitable drooping hat and the same colorless overcoat pinned up close to his chin. His walk was slow and steady, and his head was dropped slightly as usual. But his watery eyes were looking very far out in front of him, at something of especial importance. Very plainly, he had this evening risen very far above such matters as the oiling of gas engines, or the stealing of the Widow Murphy's hogs. And he carried the little black pipe in his hand rather than in his mouth. It was the first time he had ever arrived in the store with the pipe in his hand. Half consciously, all the men noted this. It was a sign and a promise. Tobe Snow was to tell a thing tonight that had not escaped his lips for years.

Tobe sat down, amidst a short general silence, in a chair directly opposite to Josh Bowdin and J. P. Cass, from which he would be able to look at the faces of all the men. At first, however, he seemed hardly to note their presence. Instead, his small eyes were fixed immediately on the coal bucket. There was no fire now, in late April, and the coal bucket had become half filled with wads

of tobacco-stained paper, bits of twine, cigar butts, and a few red and green tobacco cans. Tobe's mouth was sucked inward, in a way very unusual for him, until at last it became only a folded line across his face. It might have been a deliberate, half-disguised grin, and it might have been a sign of great philosophical concentration. Only his slightly shiny eyes revealed that he was absorbed in matters infinitely more important than coal buckets or what the men around him might be talking about.

It was Josh Bowdin who started the talk again. He said something about the difficulty of identifying stolen hogs. The others went on, speaking from time to time, slowly and hesitantly as before. They kept looking at Tobe now and then, vaguely conscious of something unusual in him. He seemed especially indifferent to them and their talk tonight. Only once did he look up from the coal bucket. It was just after Perry Lawson had said again how sorry he was that it had to be the Widow Murphy. Tobe's eyes stared at the man in a quick look of disdain. A moment later he went back to the coal bucket as if for relief.

It was nearly an hour later before Tobe first spoke. The talk had died down to mere fragmentary remarks. And now there was a long silence. Tobe's eyes blinked, lifted from the coal bucket, and went slowly around the circle of faces. He saw that Prairie Green had grown tired of its idle talk at last. He shifted upward in his chair. All the men looked at him with curious, expectant eyes. His gaze fastened on J. P. Cass and Josh Bowdin. His folded mouth opened and he began to speak. His voice sounded like a sudden, resentful cackle breaking above the absolute silence in the store.

"It was just after they had opened up the first livery barn here," he said abstractedly, as if linking his words with something that had gone before in his mind. "They wasn't many rigs in the whole country yet. Pete Zellers, he had the finest. Brand new. Flashin' yaller wheels, and all the trimmin's. Real leather seat, fancy top. Pete, he lived just this side a the river. Big fine farm down there. You fellers don't remember anything about Pete. Shame he got started playin' the Board a Trade. Went busted. Then dug out. Don't know where he went."

Tobe's eyes had dropped to the toe of his oversized shoe. He looked at his foot more and more complacently as his voice went on. But now his eyes darted around the faces of the men. He saw

Josh Bowdin also looking at the shoe. A flash of resentment seemed to come from his eyes, as if Josh had no right to be interested in the shoe. Then his gaze dropped again. The suggestion of a wary smile came back into his face. He seemed to be finding his own secrets again, hidden somehow in the big scuffed toe.

"Pete had a team of sorrel horses. Fastest flesh ever I seed in this country. Decked out all fancy. Brass mounted harness. I made them harness. Spent most of a whole winter on 'em. They was the kind of harness you'd like to see on horses like them was.

"Well, Pete used to come into town like the wind. Sittin' up in that flashin' new buggy, drivin' like mad. Keepin' a stiff line on that team till he got right up to the hitch rack in the street. And always holdin' a whip over 'em. Not that he needed to, with them sorrels. But Pete was that way. He'd hold a whip over anything he drove. Pete was a hard man some ways. Most fellers didn't like him. It was like he was holdin' a whip, when he talked to people. Only me and Pete always got along fine. It was just the way he had. Makin' them harness for him, me and Pete got along fine.

"One day word came into town about them sorrels of Pete's. Jack Bowdin heard about it first. He was workin' at the livery stable then. It was before Jack got his mules. Jack came runnin' up to the harness shop. Told me Pete's sorrels were stolen. He was just shoutin'. Wanted me to go right down there with him. So we took the best team they was in the livery stable. Was out of town in no time. Everybody else just standin' around, talkin' crazy excited.

"We drove right down to Pete's place. Pete wasn't there. Was over the other side of the river, pickin' out timber he was goin' to use for some buildin'. It was one of the hired men had come into town to tell about the stealing. Come in on an old slow work mare Pete had.

"Well, we got there, and fast too. Had a good team of big bays afore us. But we couldn't find out nothin'. Hired men just knew Pete's sorrels were gone, that's all. They'd been out in the field when it happened. The women folks so excited they couldn't tell us anything certain. Just plumb istorical, they was. One said they'd taken the sorrels toward the river. The other said the other way. One said they was two men with shotguns. Other said it was just one man, said he had a pistol and a shotgun both.

"Jack and me had to figure it out for ourselves. We figured they'd take the road to the river, then follow the trail road. They wasn't any towns on the trail road for a long ways. They'd probably cross at the bridge down this side of Wayneton. Then try to get away to the southern part of the state. Takin' a road through the hills, drivin' at night, hidin' in the daytime. They wasn't hardly any towns to mention on them hill roads neither.

"We drove hard for the river. Knew we couldn't hope to catch 'em for a day or two. Mebbe a week. But wanted to keep close right at the start. It'd help to trace 'em easier. Down at the river we thought we seed their tracks. Couldn't be sure, but looked like it just when we turned into the old trail road.

"We was goin' along the trail road. A little slower. Had to pull up a little on account of the road. Then Jack asked all at once, a cold steady look comin' in his eye, he asked who'd I think it was. Course I didn't know nothin' about horse thieves. Jack did, workin' in the livery barn that way, hearin' fellers talkin'. He said he was sure it was nobody but Nig Harper hisself. Just about the worst horsethief ever untied a halter in this whole country. Jack said he was sure it was him. Pickin' the best team in the whole country like that. Just comin' in and doin' the job in the daytime that way. Looked like Harper, Jack said. Nobody else. And then Jack laughed a little. He was thinkin' of what the women said. Seein' two men and then seein' one man, and not knowin' which way they went off. Jack knew what women was when it came to things like that. Horse stealin' . . . or any kind of stealin' . . ."

Tobe's high crackling voice stopped deliberately. He looked over at J. P. Cass, then at the other men, his face filling with scorn and disgust for a half-minute or more. It was as close as he would come to any mention of the Widow Murphy or her hogs.

His voice rose again. He spoke resentfully and very laconically for a while. "We kept on. Crossed at the Wayneton Bridge about four o'clock. Pulled up into the hills. The road kept windin' around like a snake full a whiskey. Couldn't see nothin' ahead. Didn't meet nobody anywheres. They was a little ole house at one place. Only an ole woman there. Couldn't tell us nothin', got all excited. Couldn't a told which way the rig was goin' if she had seed it.

"We kept goin' on till dusk. The road got pretty dark. Then, about nine o'clock we got a

moon. That made it easy. Your eyes gettin' more and more used to lookin' ahead, you could see as plain as day. Course I was carryin' one a the shotguns all ready then. Keepin' it between my knees. Huntin' a man like Bill Harper, you had to be fixed for him any time.

"We kept goin' thatway all that first night. Jack's bays was a big powerful team. Pulled them hills steady all night. Hardly stopped once. Give 'em a breath or two just a few times after bad places in the road on sides a long hills.

"Well, about mornin' we got to a little place. Just a few houses. Looked like boxes settin' together at the bottom of a hill. Settin' there very still, and it kind of dark yet all around 'em. Found one old feller there. Putterin' around, lightin' a lamp in just a little two-by-four store. Course he didn't know nothin'. Pretty soon some other fellers came in from the houses. They talked enough, but didn't say nothin'. One feller said he thought he'd heard a rig goin' by in the night. But the others looked at him only like he had no business talkin' at all. He was a little feller with a funny lookin' head. You could tell he was a kind of a half-wit.

"It was gettin' a little more light then. We started to lookin' around. Down at the end of the houses where the road turned, we found what we was lookin' for. They was buggy tracks there, fresh as you'd want to see. I saw Jack grinnin' at me then, there in the risin' light. The cold look comin' in his eyes, but him agrinnin' just the same. Jack was the quietest feller you ever see, in some ways. But he wasn't afeard a nothin'. And they wasn't anything he hated like horsethieves. He'd gone after the devil turned horsethief. That's what Jack would.

"We figured it wasn't any use agoin' right away. They wouldn't be drivin' them sorrels in the daytime. They'd hide out somewheres in the hills till night. We'd just have to wait. Might see where their tracks left the road. And then, we mightn't. The road was pretty muddy in places, and sometimes it was just bare rock on the sides a hills. We'd just have to wait till night. Couldn't risk gettin' ahead of 'em. Fed and watered the team — had some corn in the back of the buggy. Got a bed from a feller in one of the houses. Slept there that day. His women folks didn't want us to. They was scared to death. Got all excited. You'd think we was the horsethieves ourselves. That's women folks for ye."

Tobe Snow stopped long enough to look at the

men about him. The scorn came back to his face. The figure of Rosy Murphy came back to the minds of all the men in the store. Her spirit was there above them for a few moments, ridiculous and remote. Then Tobe's gaze went back to the solemn importance of his toe again.

"The next night we drove till daylight. Stoppin' only a couple times, when we thought we heard buggy wheels ahead of us. But they wasn't nothin'. Didn't see a thing. It was just sun-up when we got to Jay's Gap. Just a little place between two hills, no more than a dozen houses. The road ran right through there. Some of them said they was sure they heard a team goin' through in the night. Three or four fellers said they did. But you couldn't be sure. They was talkin' big. Wanted to seem important. You could tell that. The road all along there was hard and rocky. You couldn't tell anything about tracks. Anyways we stayed. Didn't go on another foot. Just waited till night again. We couldn't be goin' wrong. We was pretty sure a that. Not any other road to speak of in that whole country. Jack was sure of it. His look just as cold as ever. Him just grinnin' — sure, like a feller already lookin' over his bead and seein' the eyes of his man plain as day.

"Well we kept that up for four days. Sleepin' in the daytime. Drivin' hard every night, clear till mornin'. We kept findin' their tracks ever' day. We got away down in them hills. Found out afterwards it was almost the state line. About twenty miles from Williamsville. Big town in them days. Mills there on the river. Boats came in there then. But we didn't know. Didn't know where we was exactly. Only, we was sure that road couldn't go on much further in them hills. Knew it'd be gettin' out somewhere pretty soon. Hittin' towns somewhere. And that's what we was afraid of. They'd keep shy of towns, certain. Pull off somewheres. Keepin' away from towns. And then we'd lose 'em. Only, we knowed one thing certain. We'd gone clean to creation away from everywhere, follerin' that road through them hills."

One of the farmers in the store suddenly broke in upon Tobe. He asked, very abruptly, "How far away was you from here?" The farmer was a little man with a red over-eager face. He had never heard Tobe Snow talking before. Josh Bowdin looked at him with a cautioning leer. Tobe only lifted his eyes from his foot and stared resentfully at the little man. After a long moment

or two his eyes dropped again, and he went on as if he had never been interrupted.

"The fourth night, just comin' daylight, all at once there they was. We seed 'em, but they never seed us. Seed 'em just plain enough to tell. They was apullin' off the road into a kind of gully at the bottom of a hill. It was thick timber down in there. But we knowed what they was doin'. Goin' to hide out somewheres down in that timber till the next night. So we just waited. Jack was for goin' right down there at first. Goin' right down there and shootin' it out with 'em. But I told him no. I had another way, a whole lot surer. After awhile Jack agreed. So we just pulled off into the timber on the other side of the road, got the team away back from the road in behind a big pile a rock and bushes.

"We waited there all day. Nothin' to eat, not even any water for the team. Couldn't move even to feed the team. Just kept watchin' ever' second through the bushes.

"What we figured was we'd wait till just before night. Then we'd slip back to the road with the shotguns. They was a big rock just beside the gully, right where they'd have to come out into the road. We'd get behind that, and cover 'em with the shotguns just when they came into the road. Cover 'em that way afore they'd have time to wink, afore they could even breathe.

"Soon as dusk came we went down there, keepin' behind trees, goin' quiet as we could. Got down to the road and behind that rock. It was good light yet. You could see all right. Didn't have to wait long. Heard 'em comin' up through the gully. Came right up to the rock. So close you could hear the wheel scrape. Then they stopped, to look into the road. Right then Jack told 'em what to do with their hands. We had 'em covered cold. Our guns right up almost in the buggy. Well, you'd never think they'd a tried a thing, covered like that. But they did. The one that wasn't drivin' tried to get Jack. But Jack didn't even know his trigger arm had a hole in it till afterward. We got 'em both then. Plugged both their right shoulders. One of 'em tried to jump. Fell in the wheel. The other dropped down into the bottom of the buggy. Jack had the lines by that time, afore one of them horses moved a muscle. Had that team pulled over and wedged in between two trees. They hadn't gone twenty feet afore he had 'em quiet as two kittens and tied up to them trees with the reins. The feller in the bottom of the buggy was groanin'. The other

was back in the road, all bloody, and he wasn't stirrin'. I was holdin' the gun on 'em. You couldn't take no chances.

"Jack came back and looked at 'em. They wasn't dead, not even the feller in the road. But they looked like they was done up. There was a puddle of blood under the feller in the bottom of the buggy, and the road was all shiny red around where the other feller was layin'. Kind a sickly sight. But we had to do it. They'd a plugged us if we didn't get 'em first.

"We stuffed a couple bandanna handkerchiefs in where the shots had got 'em. Then found some old towels around some bread and pork they had in the back of the buggy. Used them too. That way we got the blood kind a stopped. After a while they didn't bleed near so much. We got 'em up into the buggy then. Jack tied 'em in the seat, both of 'em. Wouldn't take no chances at all. Then I fixed up Jack's arm. He didn't hardly want to pay any attention to it. But I made him. Fixed it up with one of them towels. Tyin' it real tight till the bleedin' stopped.

"Then Jack just stood there lookin' up at them fellers, and still grinnin', and that cold look still in his eyes. Jack wasn't such a hard man exackly. It wasn't that he liked to see 'em shot up. He was just feelin' so good, a catchin' them horse thieves. That was all.

"Jack wanted me to take the team and the two fellers and go on ahead. He'd come behind with the other team and keep watchin'. If them fellers came to and tried anything he'd be ready for 'em. Jack wouldn't risk nothin'. Them seemin' like they was done up even. Layin' up there in the buggy white as death exceptin' for the blood smears.

"Well, I got in, turned the team around, started away slow. I'd let Jack come on behind. Never dreamed a what'd happen. Then just a few minutes and I heard wheels. Didn't even look back. Just supposed it was Jack. Then the first thing I knowed I heard a shot. Came singin' right through the buggy top. The team was off, and I let 'em go, just managin' to see back at what it was. They was two fellers and a team. A good way back, but comin' right for me. One of 'em standin' up and whippin'. The other sittin' back and tryin' to get his gun on me. Didn't know what to think at first. Fact, wasn't any time for thinkin'. Just gettin' away. Drivin', and drivin' hard, that's what I had to do. I seed that in a jiffy.

"Well, I got away all right. Wasn't any horse flesh goin' to catch me with Pete Zeller's team in front of me. It was pretty hard though. Them two fellers piled up in the seat there with me. Me with one foot out on the step, tryin' to drive that way. But I did it. Pulled right away from that team back there.

"Came to a bad place in the road, though. Down between two hills. The other team kind a caught up a little. They started shootin' again, but pretty wild. Only once, it wasn't so wild. One of the shots splintered a buggy spoke under me.

"But I made it. Got up where the road was leveler, and pulled right off from 'em again. About that time I heard shots away behind. Looked back, and there was Jack, comin' down that hill, drivin' like mad. He started lettin' go at them fellers, and them tryin' to get through the bad place in the road. I got my team stopped then. We had 'em between us then, down in that holler. I started crackin' at 'em too, out a the back of the buggy, and tryin' to hold my team the same time. Jack and me both pepperin' 'em that way, they stopped. Standin' up in their rig, holdin' their hands up. Looked mighty funny, they did. One of 'em tryin' to hold his mitts away up and hold the team too. We quit shootin' then. But Jack came on. Came up behind their rig down there in the holler. I could hear him shoutin' at 'em. Then he was drivin' 'em right afore him, all the way across the holler. Brought 'em right up to where I was. Jack made 'em stop there, and drove up beside 'em. They was the funniest lookin' pair you'd ever see. One of 'em was pretty big and dark, and he'd lost his hat. The other was a little fat feller. They was just shakin' like leafs. Standin' there in the buggy with their mitts away up as high as they could stretch 'em, and shakin' like leafs.

"They was ashakin' so they couldn't hardly talk. But after a while we found out who they was. The big dark feller was a sheriff. The little fat one was a deppity. They'd come up from Williamsville. The word had got down there about the horse stealin', and the team goin' that way. And they'd come to head 'em off. They thought I was the thief, tryin' to turn back and get away from 'em. We got 'em quieted down then. Told 'em who we was. But they didn't laugh a bit. Just sittin' there now, still ashakin'. Couldn't say nothin' hardly. After a while they got turned around though. Started on back toward Williamsville, Jack and me watchin' 'em. We

just had to laugh. We knowed what they was after. They was after a reward. Thought they'd stop the thieves out here in the hills, and get the reward all for themselves. It was pretty funny, seein' 'em go off down through that holler again, drivin' slow, tryin' to dodge rocks and holes.

"Well, we got started on then, me goin' on ahead, Jack keepin' close behind all the time. The two fellers I had in the buggy with me looked kind a different now. One of 'em'd come to some, after all the joltin'. The other didn't look so dead either like he did at first. I kept watchin' 'em right along. They was all right, I knowed, tied into the rig like they was. But Jack kept right behind. Jack was sure not goin' to take no chances.

"Took us about two days comin' back. Stopped for a few hours at one of the places where we'd stayed before. Got some rest and somethin' to eat. Washed up the two fellers we'd caught. They kept lookin' stronger after they got somethin' to eat and drink. Gave 'em both a good shot a whiskey.

"We didn't have no trouble then. Kept drivin' steady all the way back. One of the fellers I had in the rig with me got so he could talk. Talkin' wild, out of his head for a long time. Then, afore we got here, he was so he knew what he was sayin'. Gave me and Jack one of the best cussin's I ever heard. The other one just kept wakin' up once in a while, and lookin' steady out in front of him. He didn't know nothin' though. Couldn't talk at all.

"Got back here to Prairie Green early in the mornin'. Just about daylight. Put the two fellers in ole Doc Slack's office, up above the grocery store. Had to call Doc out a bed for it. Didn't even bother about Jud Maresh. He was marshal then. Wasn't no good tryin' to call him. He'd been asleep down in the office at the livery barn. Always sleepin' down there. Didn't know nothin'. Might just as well not been any marshal in town. Wasn't no good for nothin'.

"Well, everybody woke up that mornin', and there was the horse thieves, right there in Doc Slack's office. And Pete Zeller's team was there in the livery barn, real as any horse flesh this town ever seed. The fellers around town couldn't hardly believe their eyes. Just kept agoin' up to Doc's office to see them two fellers, and then down to the livery barn to look at the team. Asking me and Jack questions, the whole town talking at once and askin' questions. Of course we didn't try to tell 'em everything then. Didn't say much at all.

Jack just sent word to Pete Zellers, tellin' him his team was up in the livery barn. 'Nother feller drove over to the county seat. Left word at the sheriff's office.

"Then two fellers came here from over in the eastern part of the state. I forget, some big town over there. They was detectives. They knowed right off who them two horsethieves was. It was just as Jack Bowdin said. We'd caught one a the worst horse thieves ever came into the state. Yes, sir, nobody but Nig Harper. And the other one was a bad egg too. His name was Sanders. He'd been in the pen twice. Been mixed up in a lot a horse stealin' afore this. Yes sir, that's who we'd caught. Nig Harper and this feller Sanders. Nobody else.

"Well, must a been a month afore the trial came. Them two fellers was about all right then. We just told what happened, that was all. Me and Jack. But the Judge, he gave us a great speech. Talked about what we'd done for law and order. Me and Jack, we just listened, not sayin' anything. Didn't mind it much. The way Jack said afterward, me and him talkin' by ourselves, he was satisfied. Catchin' them horsethieves, that was all he wanted. Especially when it was Nig Harper. Jack hated horsethieves worse than anything. Dead against 'em. Jack told me once, he'd take a rattlesnake afore he would a horsethief."

A tone of solemn finality had come into Tobias Snow's voice. His mouth closed very slowly and very firmly, as if he were resolved never to open it again. He rose from the chair deliberately, like a man satisfied that he could now afford to keep still forever.

But after a few moments Tobe's eyes brightened, he leaned forward slightly as he stood gazing down at the faces of the men, and spoke again, with unmistakable condescension. He said, "That's how we used to catch thieves in this town — horse thieves." Then his whole face seemed to beam with scorn. He added, "And we didn't need no women to help us neither."

Tobias Snow turned and walked steadily out of the store. The door slammed behind him. The men about the stove looked at each other smiling. But nobody laughed aloud, and nobody said anything for some time.

Outside, the scuffling of oversized shoes moved along the street. It seemed to be the only sound in Prairie Green. The low dark stores pushed out over the sidewalk, listening curiously, but only the

large white stars of April, which knew all things, even to such trifling matters as the exact whereabouts of Rosy Murphy's hogs, saw whether Tobe Snow's face was serious or grinning as he walked on steadily through the shadows in the street.

TWO POEMS

HOWARD NUTT

Steam Boat

Somewhere behind the rock-cliff curve
At the Indian Outlook,
Two-toned and guttural her whistle churns
The night with echoes.

Pushing a barge arm-length in front of her
She makes the bend and straightens for the bridge.
She comes, holding her chin above the water.
The hills remember her,
Old Illinois river ghost;
Out of a fog that is not fog
But dust and moonlight of another day
The hills lean on their elbows to watch her pass.

Village

The cup between these hills will overflow
With darkness soon
Bathing the heat from the stones on the hillside,
Hushing the clucking blackbirds,
Hushing all but the poplar trees, that whisper.
They have wrapped the winds about themselves . . .

And what shall we say now, leaning over the valley
Where evening comes like a pool of shadow?
What can we say, now, looking down on the quiet village

With a ghost of smoke or a whirlpool of swallows
Above each chimney?

As one might bend over a sleeper —
Watching the calm mask of sleep —

So let us lean over the valley,
Regarding only the quiet face of the evening,
Nor be inquisitive what dreams

Flicker and twitch beneath this pool of darkness.

We need not summon up these noisy men
Who gossiped or quarreled an hour ago.

Their poor domestic sounds are silent now.

And now there is a space when we consider them
As though they were each man past-gossip-gone . . .

The great simplicity is on them now . . .

The mute and meaning pity of the night . . .

I'VE BEEN READING —

REGIONAL LITERATURE

The fourth volume of *Folk-Say* (1932) bears the interpretive sub-title, *The Land Is Ours*. The larger theme of this book, as of its predecessors in Mr. Botkin's series, is the relation of the man, woman and child to their environment—a kind of literary ecology which is filled and running over with literary and social significance.

There is more of the South and Southwest here than of other regions. The editor, an unacademic member of the faculty of the University of Oklahoma, is doing great things for all that is typically southwestern. It is wrong to think of these distinguished *Folk-Say* volumes as being basically geographical in inspiration or purpose; it is indeed wrong to think of them as *moeurs de province* literature. It is true that they are prevailingly bucolic in their settings, that they smack of the land and the soil; but it is true also that they have a large, pervasive meaning for American life wherever it is.

Poetry, sketches, short stories, anecdotes fill the volume. The widest latitude is allowed by the editor. There is no little writing in experimental forms, some of it more interesting for what it aims at than for what it attains; yet the level of the book is surprisingly high. George Milburn, Sterling Brown, Moe Bragin are in the list of contributors, and a group of New Mexicans—Mary Austin, Alice Corbin, Haniel Long, Spud Johnson, and others. Sterling Brown again succeeds in capturing the accents of his race (in certain moods, at least) better than any of his fellow writers:

Look at old Scrappy puttin' on dog,
Puttin' on dog, puttin' on dog,
Look at old Scrappy puttin' on dog,
Steppin' like nobody's business.

With a brand new silk shirt pink as a sunset,
With a pair of suspenders blue as the sky,
With bulldog brogans red as a clay road—
Pull up, mule wagons, let the mail train by!

Norman Macleod's verse pictures of New Mexico called "Ancient Death" and "Glyphs" are notable. Pat Morrisette has some more Paul Bunyan materials. There are two dramatic pieces—a three-act tragedy by Virgil Geddes and a one-act play by E. P. Conkle.

The book is published by the University of Oklahoma Press at three dollars.

Also edited by B. A. Botkin is *The Southwest Scene* (Economy Company, Oklahoma City), a selection of poems of the American Southwest, with notes by the editor. I highly recommend this little volume to all who are interested in that important phase of contemporary art which centers, perhaps, at Santa Fé. It is not as limited as this might indicate, having no little flavor of the plains as well as of the mountains; but what one may think of as the Santa Fé spirit animates this collection. It includes Stanley Vestal's fine "Ballads of Kit Carson" and "Prairie Pictographs," some fine work by Haniel Long and Witter Bynner, and John Gould Fletcher's "The Pioneers."

F. L. M.

THREE GOOD NOVELS

A deeply satisfying first novel is Gladys Hasty Carroll's *As The Earth Turns* (Macmillan, \$2.50). Life on a New England farm, in a New England family of many members, is lived by the reader as he turns the pages of this book—lived through the changing seasons of a year. The father, Mark Shaw, is the most fully realized and strongest character of the book; but the second wife, the younger children, the son who has gone to college, the older sons and their wives, all are whole, genuine and interesting, as only the people of a book at once honest and brilliantly written ever come to be. Only in the daughter, Jen, is there before the end of the story a sense of over-sweetness, and even this is not such as to destroy the effect of complete sincerity. There is a fine feeling for the land itself behind the narrative, but it is in the details of house-keeping and garden-making, of cooking and hoeing, that the reader participates most vividly, with a keen, fresh sense of enjoyment. I feel that many readers of *THE MIDLAND* will like this novel.

Expatriates from New England farms may be found in the agitated throng of characters in Albert Halper's *Union Square*, (Viking Press, \$2.50), along with Russians, Jews, Mexicans, Italians, Hungarians—a liberal sampling of polyglot New York. There is a fine energy in this book, a great vitality in the way a score of stories of significant experience in as many lives, largely independent of each other and representing widely different backgrounds and motives, are woven together into an absorbing and largely unified narrative. The effect of economic depression is a common element in many of the stories, as is radicalism, communism in various dilutions. A vigorous indictment of the pseudo-intellectual semi-communist is one of the high points of the story; police brutality in suppressing a demonstration is another. I think this novel is somewhat uneven in writing, not so sure or powerful in some parts as the best that Halper can do, and I feel that it loses something of reality through somewhat melodramatic elements in the ending.

Rollo Walter Brown has carried on in *Toward Romance* (Coward, McCann, \$2.50) the story of a family begun in *The Firemakers*, and has restated and amplified the theme of that novel. Giles Dabney inherits from his father Luke, central character of *The Firemakers*, and from his mother as well, love of beauty and the capacity to create it. This novel presents the experience of his boyhood and youth in the shadow of the coal industry, in the hills where his father is attempting to make a living for the family by operating a small pottery. The characterization of the boy is warmly sympathetic and genuine, and many of the minor characters, the men and women of the mining village especially, are admirably presented. I feel something of strain in the device whereby the boy "gets out" at last, to seek in a wider world the realization of his creative capacities; but this is much more than compensated by the clear sincerity and warmth of feeling of the novel as a whole.

J. T. F.

EDITORIAL

JOHN T. FREDERICK

The fourth year of the depression proves to be one year too many for *THE MIDLAND*. The income of the magazine has declined so sharply within the last six months that publication of further issues would add immediately to the already heavy deficit from preceding years; and I feel unable to assume further indebtedness on account of the magazine.

I am sorry to stop, because I feel that *THE MIDLAND* has not outlived its usefulness, that there is still a place for it to fill. Young writers are doing, perhaps increasingly, sound and competent work that deserves publication; and I know that under present publishing conditions in America much of this work, and some of the best of it, will not find publication. I regret the necessity of suspension, too, because I appreciate the personal interest in *THE MIDLAND* of many of its readers. Some of them have made real sacrifices in order to help keep it alive during the difficult years already past. I am sorry that in some degree I must seem to be breaking faith with these readers. And of course I shall miss *THE MIDLAND* for its own sake. For nearly twenty years I have given to it money taken from my income as teacher and farmer, time taken from my work as teacher and farmer, from my reading, from my family life; and though the money and time have been alike sometimes needed and hard to spare, my personal rewards have been great.

The earliest issues of *THE MIDLAND* were rather definitely regional, but in later years, though the regional name has been retained, the magazine has welcomed good work from all parts of the country on equal terms.

Not all of the present readers of *THE MIDLAND* know its whole history. Publication was begun with the issue for January, 1915, while I was still an undergraduate at the State University of Iowa. Actively associated in the foundation and earlier years of *THE MIDLAND* were my fellow-students Ival McPeak and R. L. Sergel; Raymond Durboraw of the faculty of the State Teacher's College at Moorhead, Minnesota, who died in New York in 1918; and C. F. Ansley, who as head of the English Department at the State University of Iowa and consulting editor of *THE MIDLAND* during its earlier volumes made a fun-

damentally important contribution both to the direction of the magazine and to its contents.

In 1917 I left an instructorship at the State University of Iowa to teach with Durboraw at Moorhead and to edit the magazine there with his help. Two years later I went with my family to a farm at Glennie, Michigan, where the Ansleys were our neighbors. *THE MIDLAND* went along, and the editorial work was done in intervals of building and of clearing and plowing new land.

When the new farm felt the force of post-war deflation in 1921, I returned to the State University of Iowa to teach in the English department under Hardin Craig. At this time Ruth Suckow was an associate editor for a time, and both before and after the return of the magazine to Iowa City it received invaluable help from other associate editors, notably Edwin Ford Piper and Nelson Antrim Crawford. With the exception of the year 1923-24 when I taught at the University of Pittsburgh with Percival Hunt, and parts of several years spent at the farm at Glennie, I continued to teach at the State University of Iowa until 1930. In 1925 Frank Luther Mott became co-editor of the magazine, and for the next five volumes he carried his full half of the editorial burdens in a way that meant more than can be readily suggested, both to *THE MIDLAND* and to me. During this period there were several successive student assistants who made real contributions, among them Charles Brown Nelson, Charles W. Roberts, Percy S. Wood, and Harry Hartwick.

When I moved the magazine to Chicago in 1930, in the hope of finding for it wider circulation and increased influence, Mr. Mott became associate editor and has continued to serve in that capacity. During my residence in Chicago I have taught in the English Department at the University of Notre Dame, and also in the Department of Contemporary Thought in the Medill School of Journalism of Northwestern University.

From its beginning *THE MIDLAND* has been in part, directly and indirectly, the work of Esther Frederick. Since the removal to Chicago she has accepted an increasing share of editorial responsibility, and the quality of the latest volumes is in large degree due to her.

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